

IMPACT OF THE AFRICAN TRADITION ON  
CHRISTIANITY IN AFRICA THROUGH THE  
INDEPENDENT CHURCH MOVEMENTS

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## D E D I C A T I O N

This Professional Project is dedicated to

My wife, Angeline Cecelia

and

my son, Saye Menlekeh

for their self-sacrificing love, encouragement,  
and limitless patience which helped me to pre-  
pare the drafts in exclusion of the many hours  
which should have been theirs.

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and

my daughter, Kau Louise

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter		Page
I.	INTRODUCTION.....	1
	Problem Statement.....	1
	Thesis of Project.....	14
	Importance of Problem.....	16
	Scope and Limitation of Study.....	17
	Work Previously Done On the Subject.....	18
	Definitions.....	20
	Methodology.....	28
	Outline of the Project.....	29
II.	THE PLANTING OF CHRISTIANITY IN AFRICA.....	30
	Early Christianity	
	Egypt.....	30
	Ethiopia.....	30
	West Africa.....	37
	How Christianity Spread.....	44
	Response and Conflict.....	46
	Summary.....	60
III.	THE INFLUENCE OF WESTERN MISSION CHURCHES ON AFRICAN TRADITION.....	63
	Education.....	63
	Evangelism.....	74
	Health.....	75
	Leadership Development.....	78
	Institutional Structure--	
	Marriage and Kinship.....	82
	Missionary Against Tribal Solidarity--	
	Disruption.....	90
	Summary.....	91
IV.	THE INFLUENCE OF AFRICAN TRADITION ON WESTERN CHRISTIANITY.....	95
	Causative Factors For the Rise of the Independent Church Movements.....	95
	Rise of Independent Churches--	
	Schism and Renewal.....	104
	Prayer and Healing In African Churches.....	120

Role of Women.....	123
Doctrine of the Independent Churches.....	125
Independent Churches and the Spread of Christianity.....	127
The Muslims and the Christians.....	128
A Forum of Dialogue--An Ecumenical Approach....	131
Areas of Emphasis in African Churches-- Summary.....	134
Summary.....	136
 V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION--THE DESTINY OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH IN AFRICA.....	139
Restatement of the Problem.....	139
Summary of Chapters 2, 3, & 4.....	140
Statement About the Thesis.....	143
Preliminary Conclusion About the Thesis.....	144
The Destiny of the Christian Church in Africa..	145
 VI. BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	151

## ABSTRACT

The thesis of this professional project is that if Christianity in Africa is to become effective and meaningful, it must become an indigenous religion of Africa; it must be rooted in the African soil and culture; and must be capable of dealing with the issues and problems of Africa. In addition, the indigenization or Africanization of Christianity must produce a Christianity which addresses itself to the issues of human liberation--liberation from centuries of poverty, humiliation, exploitation and cultural imperialism.

For the past century or more, the mission church in Africa has been actively engaged in education, health, agriculture, evangelism and social welfare. The church has been a potent factor for change. Missionaries offered their time, money and lives for Africa.

In spite of all the sacrifices made by missionaries, and the contributions of the church, Christianity did not win the entire heart of the African people. It is still regarded by some as an alien religion which did not incarnate itself into the culture. Many Africans and missionaries are leveling criticisms against the church for failing to address the problems of Africa. This poses a serious threat to the life of the church in Africa.

Consequently, there are over six thousand independent church movements all over Africa today stemming from the distasteful attitude toward mission Christianity. These churches are becoming more successful and winning more followers because they have incorporated many traditional elements into Christianity to give it the appealing flavor for

the indigenous African worshippers. There is a return to the use of African symbolism in Christian worship and sacraments. The music, language, and other aspects of Christianity that were oriented to western style are being changed into African expressions and <sup>the</sup> church is beginning to take on an Afro-Biblical style of ministry. These churches practice faith healing, polygamy, have prayer groups, etc. Women's role has taken on a new accent. African churches have developed their own form of baptism similar to Traditional African anointment pattern. They have developed their own style of ministry, doctrine, theology, and liturgies out of their own life's experience and community religious background.

As a result of the independent churches, Christianity in Africa is reaching the inner heart of the man and woman on the grass-root levels--people whose life had never been actually touched by mission Christianity. These churches meet the needs of the people. These needs may be religious, emotional, psychological, medical, or even physical, but most important is the fact that African churches are able to re-interpret the Biblical revelation of God to the people in the language which they understand.

On the other hand, the church is facing a serious threat from Islam. which has become very successful in winning more converts in Africa because it is incarnated into the culture and does not engage in the inhuman practices of the west such as colonialism, imperialism and mass exploitation. Christianity must redirect its goals and set better priorities than it has done previously.



The independent churches are not mere "Christo-pagan movements, or sects" they are authentically Christian and authentically African because they are "strongly biblical, and make no conscious deviations from Orthodox doctrine."

No one knows exactly the destiny of Christianity in Africa, but it is evident that Christianity is a vital force in Africa and the church is still an important factor in the life of the people. The spontaneous growth of Christianity substantiates the point. This growth is made possible through the independent churches.

If the mission churches in Africa must have a significant future, they too must do what the independent churches are doing; make the church not only Christian, but also African. They must incarnate the church into the culture of the people and must use the elements and symbols of the people so that Christianity can be best expressed and understood. Christianity must not compromise with unchristian principle and yet, it must not reject everything in Africa indiscriminately. Above all else, Africanization of Christianity must not only include the use of physical African cultural elements by adding a drum here and a fufu there, but by making Christianity applicable and meaningful for the African whereby it speaks to him in his existential situations and conditions.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### Problem Statement

The purpose of this professional project is to examine the effect of the changes in Africa through the Independent Church movements.

Before I move to the central concern of the paper, I want to discuss the problem in the mission churches which gave rise to the changes.

"Change, turmoil, schism, (and renewal)--this is Africa in the last hundred years."<sup>1</sup> African leaders in politics and in the church are saying:

No dark imitation of Western man. No encumbrance of Western trappings. They are taking a close, careful second look at themselves and their countries, focusing on those institutions and social values of the colonial era that had the greatest impact on people's life.<sup>2</sup>

Africans are looking closely at themselves and the church, focusing on what it means to them as Africans. They are re-evaluating and reassessing the role of Christian Missions in Africa.

Western Mission Christianity has not been able to plant and transplant itself on African soil and become a way of life for the majority of African people. It has, for the most part, always been pre-

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<sup>1</sup> Donald M'Timkulu, *Beyond Independence* (New York: Friendship Press, 1967), p. 5

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

sented and received as an alien religion.

For the past century or more, the church in Africa has been actively engaged in education, health, agriculture, and social welfare. It has been one of the potent factors for social change. The entire continent of Africa has experienced this sweeping influence of the mission church in many ways. In some of the African countries, the church has established its influence not only in health and education, but also through the struggle for the indigenous people to achieve their political independence from colonialism. Many missionaries have sacrificed their lives for the work of the mission in Africa. Men and women of devout conviction have suffered many hazardous situations in Africa in the name of Christ and His gospel. Men like Albert Schweitzer, David Livingstone, Melvin B. Cox, Wendell Coldwell and hundreds of others are examples of the dedication of missionaries to the cause of Africa.

From the early beginnings of missionaries' exposure to Africa in the 18th and 19th centuries, there were many difficulties for them. There were many problems such as bad roads, bad water, poor communication systems, hostilities, and inadequate medical facilities, just to name a few. As a consequence, many of the missionaries died in service while in Africa and others became seriously sick with malaria or other tropical diseases which forced them to return home. In some cases, the missionaries were deported by colonial and/or indigenous governments alike for political and other reasons.

These many hazards continued to confront succeeding generations of missionaries to Africa until conditions were changed considerably as

a result of modern facilities. But the work of the church continued. The church has consistently fought against powers and principalities.

The words of Melvin B. Cox still inspire millions today in the missionary field. He said, "Though a thousand fall, let not Africa be given up." Indeed, more than a thousand have fallen but Africa has not been given up yet. The gospel is continuously being preached and the work of the church still goes on despite all the many difficulties.

Yet, in spite of all the sacrifices made by missionaries and the many contributions of the church, Christianity has not won the entire heart of the African people. It is still regarded by some people as an alien religion. Even though the church has had a strong and positive impact upon the African people through its social programs, changes, challenges, engagement, and involvement of strong teams of overseas workers,<sup>3</sup> yet, ironically, the gospel which ought to be the undergirding principle in the entire mission's work has yet to be fully accepted by the African people.

From all the corners of the African continent today, prominent churchmen and political leaders are making their assessment of the church. In their evaluations they are leveling some comprehensive criticisms against the missionaries and the church which, of course, pose a serious threat to the life and work of the church in Africa. Therefore, the criticisms must not be taken lightly. If the church in Africa is to have any significant future, these criticisms that have been di-

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John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1970), p. 314.

rected against it by African churchmen, political leaders, and even by some of the missionaries themselves must be viewed seriously and not just be regarded as light matters, or as "just one more example of the Africans' ungratefulness after all that we have done for them." As Dr. M' Timkulu points out, "This attitude, very much in evidence in certain parts of the West, shows a pathetic misreading of mission."<sup>4</sup>

The future of the church in Africa to a large degree depends upon the ability of churchmen to understand and deal constructively with the criticisms and find means by which the many mistakes that have caused the negative assessments can be rectified. Dr. M'Timkulu continued his statement concerning this matter when he wrote:

It is not fair to the African, nor to the motives of great majority of mission work supporters, whose aim is not a religious dole but the achievement by all men of their potential as sons of God. Even so, there is a pressing need for an objective look at the mission enterprise in order to clear away some of the confused thinking that makes things unnecessarily hard for the new autonomous churches.<sup>5</sup>

Let me emphasize at this point that in all fairness, it is not all missionaries that are guilty of the many criticisms leveled against missionaries and the church. The reader must be informed here that Africa has received some of the best churchmen that the Western world can offer. These men and women gave all they had to Africa in terms of their time, money, energy and their whole life to serve humanity. Yet, on the other hand, the West also gave to Africa some of the worst. It

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4

M'Timkulu, p. 14.

5

*Ibid.*

is the works of such persons that have given rise to the criticisms.

As an African churchman, I believe that the church in Africa can still be a vital part in the achievement of social, political, economic, and religious freedom and liberation of the African people if Christianity is correctly interpreted and practiced. Turning a deaf ear to the many issues and problems created by the church and pretending that they do not exist does not help the situation. It only intensifies the resentment against the church. It makes it even more difficult for honest people to remain a part of the church. Refusal to consider these criticisms objectively simply hinders the growth and development of the work of the Christian church. I therefore, challenge the church to rethink and re-evaluate its role.

One of my reasons for including these criticisms in the project is that I believe that they are a necessary part of understanding thoroughly the essential point I am trying to make. The emergence of the six thousand independent church movements all over the continent of Africa are the direct result of the mission churches' failure to deal with the criticisms. These independent churches are important factors in the growth of Christianity in Africa today. These churches are providing a challenge for the mission or established churches, therefore, they cannot be ignored. In order to do justice to my attempt, I believe that the reader should understand the nature of the criticism leveled against the church in order to know the reasons behind the quest for an African theology, and the search for an indigenous African Christianity. The influence of the African tradition on Christianity is best understood

only in light of the understanding of the causative factors that undergird the independent church movements.

Therefore, as I discuss the impact of the African tradition on Christianity through the independent church movements, I have included also at various points in this professional project, the words of the critics about the church in terms of its "failures and drawbacks, its superficialities and foreignness,"<sup>6</sup> which have influenced the opinions of the critics and have given impetus to the proliferation of independent church movements.

Even though I believe that the church has done much good to and for Africa and Africans, I also maintain that these criticisms must be pointed out so that the present work or this project can be understood better. Secondly, by knowing what the critics are saying, honest churchmen can best be able to revitalize the life of the church.

I wish to also add another point here at the outset. This work is not intended to be viewed as a critique of missions. What I have set out to do is impossible without inserting the many criticisms that have influenced the inclusion of African traditional elements into Christianity.

Criticism as such is not always evil; it has a useful function. It arouse critical intelligence from what Kant calls "dogmatic slumber." It questions hollow assumptions and smug hypocrisy and demands honest investigation. Criticism helps to expose errors, and urges correction. It stimulates discussion and exchange of opinions which fosters progress

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Mbiti, p. 314.

in truth seeking. In order for the relationship between the Western and African Christians to be healthy and genuine, we the churchmen must be critical of our programs and be opened for continuous reassessment. Africans' criticisms of the church and of the west should not be viewed as arising from evil intentions, but arising from love--love for the church, and love for the life of the Christian faith which is so vital to the Africans. It is out of this same love for the Christian church that I attempt the task of pointing out those problems that have come as a result of historical events of missions in Africa. The church cannot escape the reassessment or the harsh light of criticism which today is the result of change, turmoil, schism and renewal. To cite at least one example, Dr. M'Timkulu wrote:

There is an interpretation of history--quite prevalent in Africa today--that says the missionary movement, and therefore Christianity, was just the more peaceful arm of colonialism. The spread of Christianity should not be encouraged in an Africa now free of the West and independent of westernisms. As a relic of colonialism, Christianity should now be thrown overboard with all the other colonial trappings.<sup>7</sup>

Dr. M'Timkulu goes on to point out that:

Such a comprehensive accusation poses a serious threat to the life of the church in Africa, and so it must be faced. The errors of the past must be recognized and corrected. Until they are, the church will remain on the defensive.<sup>8</sup>

Christianity has suffered too long as a result of Europeanized and Americanized models which have often times been inadequate and sometimes considered irrelevant expressions of the Faith for the African people.

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<sup>7</sup>  
M'Timkulu, p. 14.

<sup>8</sup>  
*Ibid.*



Mission Christianity in Africa has, by and large, failed to address itself to the spiritual needs and the perplexing problems of indigenous Africa and Africans. As Marie F. P. Jassy put it, the failure of the mission church is partly due to the fact that:

Western religion has not known how to become incarnated in the local culture. It has remained foreign, parallel to society. In particular, it presents itself under an essentially individualist form, while the traditional religion was essentially social. It did not respond to problems as the people experienced them.<sup>9</sup>

On the other hand, many distortions were embedded within the Christian faith, so that it has taken on a greater expression of Western culture. Christianity for the Africans had always been interpreted in terms of western political and economic system, western social lifestyle, and thus it had inherited some racial and cultural over-tone.

Bankole Timothy reminds us of the fact:

That Christianity has been prostituted by the West is a fact few would deny. In his book, *Adventurous Preaching*, Dr. James Robinson tells us 'how the religion of Jesus has been reduced to vassalage to economics, science and politics.' There is no divine sanction or theological proof whatsoever which supports the identification of the capitalistic economic system of the West with Christianity. The system of Western political democracy also holds no case for an identification with Christianity.<sup>10</sup>

Christianity was European or American in nature; and Africans had to become 'civilized' in a western sense before they were 'christianized.' In this process, a person accepting Christianity ceased to be an African and became a stranger and a "foreigner to his own people."

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Marie France Perrin Jassy, *Basic Community In The African Churches* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973), p. 73.

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Bankole Timothy, *Missionary Shepherds and African Sheep* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Daystar Press, 1971), p. 14.

ple."<sup>11</sup>

In spite of the fact that the Mission Church in Africa has achieved greater things in and for Africa in terms of education, healing and social welfare, and although it has been one of the forerunners of activating the spirit of freedom in terms of political independence for the Africans, I must also point out the painful truth about its mission unaccomplished in light of what is supposed to be its prime objective as a church and a mission. No one should ignore the fact that the church has lagged behind<sup>12</sup> and, in many ways has not made itself relevant<sup>13</sup> and practical to the needs, issues, and problems of the people.

Even though early missionaries tried to perpetuate a stereotype image of Africa which they had preconceived and concluded that Africa and Africans had nothing to offer<sup>14</sup> to the outside world in terms of culture, civilization, or religion,<sup>15</sup> we can now see clearly beyond all shadow of doubts that high culture and religion had existed in Africa longer than it had in Europe or in America.

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<sup>11</sup> G. C. Oosthuizen, *Post-Christianity in Africa* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), p. 256.

<sup>12</sup> Timothy, p. 59.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> E. Bolaji Idowu "Introduction" in Kwesi Dickson and Paul Ellingworth, (eds.) *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Book, 1969), p. 9.

<sup>15</sup> Per Hassing, "Christian Theology In Africa," in *Religion in Life*. XL:4 (Winter 1971), 510. Also See Mbiti, p. 12.

Concerning African traditional Religion, Mbiti says that "in Missionary circles they have been condemned as superstition, satanic, devilish and hellish."<sup>16</sup> This same mentality is carried over by persons who have attempted to challenge the authenticity of the new independent churches. They ask; "Do the independent churches in Africa present authentic Christianity or is their claim mere folk culture and superstition? What is the source of their revelation? Are they believers of Christ or is their practice mere corruptions of Christianity? What are their influences and how long will the independent churches live?" This attempt is therefore, a response to these pertinent questions.

The constituent elements within this new Christianity on the continent have been the result of the Africans' deep urge to maintain that 'old indigenous solidarity.' They are seeking "a place to feel at home."<sup>17</sup> Consequently, traditional elements have evidently permeated the faith as African churchmen have tried to modify it and make the faith applicable to meet their people's needs and situations.

This of course, had been true with other nations throughout the ages as Christianity passed on from one group of people to the next. Christianity experienced a transformation as it passed from the Jewish world to the Romans, then to the Greeks and to the Europeans and Americans. Every age, generation, and people have sought and found within

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<sup>16</sup>

Mbiti, p. 13.

<sup>17</sup>

F. B. Welbourn and A. Ogot, *A Place to Feel At Home* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), title page.

Christianity the very expressions of their own life--those expressions which meet their individual and collective needs--Africa is no exception. This has also been the core of the African plea for reformation--indigenization, and freedom to work out a theological expression that will<sup>18</sup> speak to the African in his own terms.

Christianity should never be regarded as a narrow cultural or folk way belonging to one or two ethnic groups. It is a universal Faith which encompasses life in all its dimensions. Idowu reminds us:

Of course, the Church only cuts the ground from under her own feet if, by a deliberate act, or through carelessness in her theology, she preaches a God who is the possession of any particular section of the human race. This would be a God who is 'too small' and therefore cannot be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>19</sup>

It is a regrettable situation to note that some westerners have regarded the God of the Mission Church as belonging only to the Western camp but missing in all other camps. Timothy wrote:

Is it possible that this God, this white man's God, does care for the African? Again when one reads unfortunate pronouncements such as this from Ludwig, 'it is unthinkable that the unlettered, illiterate African can have any idea whatsoever of the nature of God; God only reveals himself to the intellectuals of the West.'<sup>20</sup>

Aylward Shorter adds here that early anthropologists along with some other westerners "found it difficult to believe that Africans for example, could have an idea of God and a well-developed religion." One of the strong advocates of such belief was Sir Samuel Baker, the explor-

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<sup>18</sup>

Jassy pp. 73-74.

<sup>19</sup>

Idowu, p. 13.

<sup>20</sup>

Timothy, p. 10.

er. Concerning Northern Nilotes of Sudan Baker refers to them as having no religion. He is quoted by Shorter as saying:

Without any exception, they are without a belief in a Supreme Being, neither have they any form of worship or idolatry; nor is the darkness of their minds enlightened by even a ray of superstition.<sup>21</sup>

Idowu also remarked that:

Edwin Smith tells of his conversation with an eminent biographer, Emil Ludwig. He had told Ludwig what the missionaries were doing in Africa--teaching the Africans about God. Ludwig was perplexed. Then he made his notorious remarks, 'How can the untutored African conceive God?...How can this be?...Deity is a philosophical concept which savages are incapable of framing.'<sup>22</sup>

The question one may ask could be, does this preconceived idea still persist today, or it is long forgotten? Does this idea belong only to the past? But Idowu goes on to point out that:

Some European theologians have for a while now been curious about other people's cultures; however, some of the most prolific authors see little or nothing that is of spiritual value in these cultures and religions. For example, it was Karl Barth's conviction that 'all other religions are sin, the work of Godless men, or humanistic attempts at raising men to divine level.'<sup>23</sup>

C. H. Dodd raised a question in his book *Gospel and Law* "...is the God of our redemption the same as the God of creation? Even Kraemer was aware of a question with the same import: Is the God who spoke to Adam the same God who speaks through Jesus Christ."<sup>24</sup> Is the God who

<sup>21</sup>

Aylward Shorter, *African Culture and The Christian Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Obis Books, 1974), p. 45.

<sup>22</sup>

Idowu, p. 10.

<sup>23</sup>

*Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup>

*Ibid.*, p. 13.

reveals Himself in the Christian Church to the Christians the same God that Africans worship? These and many other questions I have attempted to explain.

These factors and many more have impeded the spontaneous growth of authentic Christianity, thus causing it to lose its effectiveness as a redemptive tool for salvation. Consequently, the plea of the indigenous churches is that Africans too can be Africans as well as Christians at the same time rather than blind imitators of Europeans. Thus, their attempt is to re-think, and re-define the mission of the church from a new perspective and give it a new tune and rhythm of African expression.

There are about six thousand separatist or independent church movements all over Africa today.<sup>25</sup> These churches are appealing to the Africans and are winning more converts and followers than the historical churches. The rate of growth of the independent churches surpasses those of the mission churches. What is the secret of their success? The answer is simple. The leaders and adherents of these new churches are willing to take the African tradition seriously. In addition, the message of their practical Christianity is rooted in the people's existential situations. And far beyond this point, there is a warm sense of mutual love (philadelphia)<sup>26</sup> and fellowship that is shared in these movements which is particularly lacking in the mission churches. The

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<sup>25</sup>

David Barrett, *Schism and Renewal In Africa* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968),

<sup>26</sup>

*Ibid.*, pp. 167-168.

impact of the African tradition on these movements has led them to become both meaningful and relevant.

In short, the validity and importance of the new African church movements is the subject to which I am addressing myself in this project.

### Thesis of Project

My thesis is that: the influence of African tradition upon the new Independent Churches will inevitably determine the destiny of the Christian church in Africa. To support the statement, I will attempt to investigate such questions as, what has been the extent of the influence of the African life style on the new kind of Christianity in Africa? What elements in traditional life of Africa have been injected into Christianity to give it the flavor which it now has, a flavor that makes it more appealing to Africans? After these elements are added to Christianity, does the faith still remain a Christian Faith? On the other hand, what is it that the Africans reject about the mission Christianity from which they are pulling away? What type of dialogue, if any, does exist between the mainstream Christianity and the independent churches? Is the question of independence basically rooted in doctrinal issues or in something else? What are the main beliefs of these independent churches and how do they differ from the mainstream churches? With these variations and divisions within the Christian Church in Africa, what could be a possible future for the growth of Christianity in Africa? What is the interplay between Islam and Mission Christianity in terms of their receptiveness to the Africans?

These are a few of the many crucial issues to which I attempt to address myself in this project. But above all else, I believe that the fundamental issue which undergirds this paper; that which I regard as the main thesis is the "influence of African tradition upon the new independent churches which will inevitably determine the destiny of the Christian Church in Africa."

In view of these conditions, I maintain in this project that if Christianity in Africa is to become really effective and meaningful, it must become an indigenous religion of Africa; it must be rooted in the African soil and culture, and must be capable of dealing with the issues and problems of Africa.

The Christian Faith will have to be translated and interpreted contextually in light of the Africans' own day to day experience as well as their experiences as informed by their past and present. If Christianity in Africa is to become effective, especially, if the mission churches desire any significant future, they will have to listen to and see what the independent churches are saying and doing. Like the independent churches, mission churches will have to start finding the synthesis between mission Christianity and African traditional religion and come out with a faith that is authentically African and authentically Christian.

A forum of dialogue between these two types of Christianity (mission and independent) becomes urgent in this process; thus mission churches would be enlightened to see the necessity of a redefinition, and a re-interpretation of Christianity for the Africans. It is through



this method that African Christianity can become applicable and relevant for the African people.

### Importance of Problem

Today in Africa, the Christian church is facing a serious predicament--an issue concerning life and death of the church. It is an issue which determines the destiny of a people and nation in face of a new religious frontier. And at such a critical juncture in the history of the church when it is apparently in a moribund stage, a period of schism, confusion, and theological upheaval, it is only appropriate that African scholars and theologians address themselves to the pressing issue of the day to save the life of the church. In the face of all the difficulties and perplexing problems, can the church continue to be truthful to its mission and its central motif--the Kerygma of Jesus Christ? Is it capable of maintaining its influence as a church without losing its identity? These questions have become exceedingly significant for all African churchmen.

Africans therefore, must, themselves fight the virus of cultural imperialism from abroad as well as the poison of parochialism and one-sidedness which are persistently hampering the churches' growth and development. When these misconceptions are injected into the stream of Christianity, they distort its true nature and objectives. The Christian church in Africa must not only strive to live in face of all this countless tumult; it must prevail. Of course, it takes strength and charisma to do the task; the power needed to give the church or Chris-

tianity among the Africans its true nature, form and structure, only God alone can supply.

### Scope and Limitation of the Study

This study does not claim to reflect all the problems within the church in Africa, nor does it attempt to provide all the needed answers or solutions to the problems at hand. To do justice to the subject of the African brand of Christianity, or even the influence of independent churches upon the Christian Church in Africa, would require volumes. Such an undertaking would appear too presumptuous and too ambitious.

What I intend to do is to bring together the known elements of the African tradition that are observable within the form of worship and the liturgical patterns of the independent churches which stem from African influence. The scope of the project is narrowed down to those traceable concepts, precepts, and practices uniquely African and are at the same time, implicit or explicit within the indigenous churches.

Each of the six thousand independent churches has somehow slightly different forms and methods of worship and their individual emphases differ widely, thus I cannot analyze each of them individually in this project. This is not a depth study in which a range of problems is studied in great detail in one small, non-representative area such as a single district, village or tribe, with the implication that any lessons learned there may legitimately be generalized to apply elsewhere. This is a breadth study which ranges over a vast number of societies--850 African tribes, but on the other hand, the work is confined to a clearly

defined problem.

What I have done is to take an aggregate but comprehensive view of the entire phenomenon of independency as related to African traditional influence. I am only dealing with major characteristic patterns that are embraced by a majority of these churches. I make no claim for completeness. This work is a pioneer attempt to lay the foundation for further studies of the influence of African tradition on Christianity in Africa.

#### Work Previously Done on This Subject

From my studies of the religions in Africa, I have not discovered any previous work done in this particular direction per se. There were by 1967 about "one thousand five hundred published articles, reports, notes, essays, surveys, books and monography" on religious movements and Christian independency in Africa.

#### Growth of Literature On African Religious Movements By Decades, 1870-1966

Decade	Items published in Decade	Cumulative total
Before 1870		8
1870-79	3	11
1880-89	3	14
1890-99	17	31
1900-09	47	78
1910-19	55	133
1920-29	102	235
1930-39	116	351
1940-49	99	450
1950-59	342	792
1960-68	809	1,601

<sup>27</sup>

*Ibid.*, p. 35.

28

W. H. Turner has detailed 1,601 works on the phenomenon of independency in Africa. None of these works deals specifically with the influence of African tradition on Christianity in Africa.

Even the best and well known books among them did not address the issue of our theme directly, but merely alluded to the subject in passing. Bengt G. M. Sundkler's book<sup>29</sup> is almost entirely about independency among the Zulu tribe in South Africa. The first edition of this book became a starting point for scholarly study and research in the field of independent church movements.

Another notable book is *Schism and Renewal in Africa: An Analysis of six thousand Contemporary Religious Movements*, by David B. Barrett. In this extra-ordinary work, Barrett attempts to study the phenomenon with 850 tribes among whom the movements have occurred. Yet in this immeasurable study, Mr. Barrett does not even devote at least one chapter to the influence of African tradition on Christianity.

As I pointed out earlier, there are tremendous amounts of literature on religious movements all over Africa, almost within all major tribes, and yet, not a single literature deals specifically with my topic. The information is fragmented and haphazard. One has to pick them from different sources and patch them together. This is what makes this

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H. W. Turner, "Bibliography of Modern African Religious Movements", *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 1:3 (1968), 143-210.

29

Bengt G. M. Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets in South Africa* (2d ed. London, Oxford University Press, 1948, 1961)

work a pioneering endeavor. This project is, therefore, a groundbreaking step which I hope will establish the subject worthy of academic scholarship and research.

### Definitions

Tradition: Tradition is defined by Webster's dictionary as "the handing down of information, belief, and customs by word of mouth or by example from one generation to another without written instruction."<sup>30</sup> A tradition also includes "an inherited pattern of thought or action (as a religious doctrine or practice or a social custom) cultural continuity in social attitudes and institutions."<sup>31</sup>

African Tradition: African tradition includes all the oral information that have been handed down from the past generations of Africans to their off-spring about certain beliefs, customs, religious practices, thought patterns, mannerisms, ethical systems, socio-political systems, forms of education, etc. African tradition, in short, is the African way of life which includes the methods and process by which African social institutions are maintained. This tradition has been handed down through oral interpretation or by word of mouth.

There are five major forces of African tradition one ought to know, or be aware of in order to understand the nature of African tradition. They are, namely: the form in which the tradition is expressed,

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<sup>30</sup>  
Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary (Springfield, MA: Merriam, 1967)

<sup>31</sup>  
*Ibid.*

the structure of the tradition, the function of the tradition, the bearers of the tradition, and the content of the tradition.

African tradition is expressed in stories, proverbs, carvings, music, dance, rituals (both verbal and non-verbal), rules and conduct. The stories are the property of the community and are without recognized authorship. The proverbs are explicit and known to all members of the community.

The structure of the African tradition can be illustrated by saying that myths and tales are prefaced by a formula indicating their non-historical character and when that formula is absent, it is assumed that the story is historically valid.

Myths are relatively unchangeable, while tales are relatively changeable. Animals are used to symbolize human qualities.

The function of the tradition points out that myths explain the origin of things and deal with the supernatural. Tales teach morals and deal with the natural. Proverbs are used to express feelings, advice and wisdom in an indirect manner. The tradition is intended to maintain good sexual, social, civil and supernatural relations, and to prevent criminal activities.

Who are the bearers of the tradition? They include leaders at the three levels of the family, civil authorities, ancestors and spirits. Other bearers of African tradition are the herbalists, seers, diviners and those who are possessed by spirits. Education in an African tradition means learning the tradition by living within it, and performing what it dictates, which process takes place successively at the three

levels of the family. What are these three levels of the family? In Africa, all men in a community are brothers at one of the three levels--the moral level united by sexual taboos, the historical level, united by traceable lineages, and the mythical level, united by a supposed common ancestor.

What is the content of the African tradition? Central to the tradition is the conviction that it should be maintained but it is believed that in fact the tradition is being progressively lost, so that the society is in a state of decline. The tradition includes the rules of conduct, guide for behavior, family organization, authority system, and the explanation of reality. This is the African tradition. In this project, when I use the term African tradition, I mean all these factors just explained above.

I acknowledge the fact that the above information about African tradition and African culture comes from a seminar held at Cuttington College in 1971 on the Philosophy of African Traditional Thought. The course was taught by Dr. John Gay. The students of the course collected the above information on the various aspects of African tradition.

Indigenous: Just what is meant by the term "indigenous?" Dictionary defines the word as follow: "Produced, growing, or living naturally in a particular region, environment, or climate; not exotic, native, hence figuratively, inherent."<sup>32</sup>

When I apply this definition to missionary work or the church, the word indigenous means that as a result of missionary effort, a na-

tional church has been produced which shares the life of the country in which it is planted and finds within itself the ability to govern itself, support itself, and reproduce itself.

The Christian Church of Jesus Christ has been designed by God Himself, so that it fills the needs of the African, Chinese, or the Indian. As a result, there is no place on earth where, if the gospel seed be properly planted, it will not produce an indigenous church. It is adapted to every humanity, and to every social climate. It is a universal gospel. The goal of mission should be to establish indigenous churches capable of self-support, self-government, and self-propagation.

Independency: Barrett, in his *Schism and Renewal In Africa*, defines independency in two parts. In the first part he writes:

Independency is defined as the formation and existence within a tribe or tribal unit, temporarily or permanently, of any organized religious movement with a distinct name and membership, even as small as a single organized congregation, which claims the title Christian in that it acknowledges Jesus Christ as Lord, and which has either separated by secession from a mission church or an existing African independent church, or has been founded outside the mission churches as a new kind of religious entity under African initiative and leadership.<sup>33</sup>

In the second definition, Mr. Barrett went on to describe what he means by the presence of independency within a given tribe or tribal unit. This is how he put it:

Independency is present in a tribe if members of the tribe or tribal unit concerned, or of sub-tribes classified under it, have either (a) initiated or otherwise produced at any time the phenomenon of an independent church movement, however small, from within its own tribal ranks on its own tribal territory, rural or urban,



and in the main under its own tribal leadership, or (b) contributed significantly within its own territory to a similar movement originating in another tribe.<sup>34</sup>

In view of these two meanings, I shall employ the word independency in this paper to refer to independency within a given tribe or tribes. Let me define the word tribe.

Tribe: When I use the word tribe in this paper as related to Africa, I mean the main social, psychological, economic and governmental reality. The usual definition of a tribe is that it is a "cluster or group of people sharing a common name, language, culture and territory."<sup>35</sup> Some scholars would add: "together with tradition of common descent and an ideological unit and consciousness of belonging, in which the collectivity or group tends to be more important than any single individual."<sup>36</sup> A tribe can also be spoken of as having a national political unit, using common symbols, and having the same history, traditions, and language. According to a definition by George Peter Murdock, a tribe is "any group of people numerically larger than a community to which members of an extended kinship group belong, often with a common name, language, culture and territory."<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>

*Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>35</sup>

*Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup>

*Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup>

George P. Murdock, *Africa: Its People and Their Cultural History* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959)

Separatist: A separatist movement is one that has been formed by secession either from a mission church, or from an existing African independent church. Some individuals prefer to use alternative terms such as sect, sectarian movement, splinter movement, dissidence, break-off, cult, proselytic cult, etc, which have derogatory connotations. But these terms have been known to be repugnant to their leaders, who much prefer them to be known as "churches." Maybe our best definition for 'separatist churches' comes from Christian G. Baeta. He writes:

The term separatist churches signifies those bodies that have more recently come into being and exhibit certain special features which make them stand apart from the main stream of Christianity<sup>38</sup> known and practiced across the world and through the centuries.

Independent Churches: What do I mean by independent church? All throughout this paper, I will be using the term independent churches to refer to those African churches that have achieved self-support, self-government, and self-propagation. For the most part, these independent churches were, from the beginning, linked with the historical churches, or their leaders were members of the historical churches. But for some reasons (see chapter 2) there is a schism and a new church is formed. The independent churches resent the terms such as 'sects,' 'cults,' 'separatists,' etc. They prefer to be called independent churches.

The first independent movements were started in West and South Africa during the 19th century. Shortly after, similar schisms occurred in East and Central Africa. Presently, there are over 500 of these

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Christian Baeta, "Conflict in Mission: Historical and Separatist Churches" in Gerald H. Anderson (ed.) *The Theology of The Christian Mission* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1961), p. 290.

independent churches in West Africa alone, 500 in Central Africa, 300 in East Africa, and about 3,000 in South Africa. New independent churches are springing up every now and then. Many more are dying out also, but it is interesting to know that about 90% of these churches do survive.<sup>39</sup>

Mission Churches: The term mission church designates ecclesiastical organizations brought over to Africa from either Europe or America. Some times they are referred to as older churches, historical churches, western churches, or mission related churches. These churches in some instances may not be self-supporting, self-governing and autonomous. They are almost always linked with some foreign boards abroad. It is usually out of these churches that independent church movements spring.

Prophetic Movement: In this type of movement, the founder or the leader is usually a charismatic person who is regarded as the spokesman or spokeswoman of God with a divine mission to his or her people. He or she preaches a new religious idea. Such movements attract many followers. A few example of such movements are the Prophet Harris'<sup>40</sup> movement of 1912 in Liberia among the Grebo Tribe and in Ivory Coast, Ghana. Another example of the Prophetic movement is Kimbanguism, a

<sup>39</sup> Geoffrey Parrinder, *Religion In Africa* (New York: Praeger, 1969), p. 149.

<sup>40</sup> Gordon Mackay Haliburton, *The Prophet Harris* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 2.

41

movement started by Simon Kimbangu in the Congo in 1921 which had attracted over three million followers in central Africa. The list goes on.

Messianic Movement: Like the Prophetic Movement, the messianic movement has a leading personality around whom the movement is centered. The difference is that in a messianic movement, the leader is regarded higher than those of a prophetic movement. He is claimed to have special powers which identify him with the Christ.<sup>42</sup> According to the African concept of a Messiah, he is not one who preaches an eschatological message, or a hope for the future heaven. He is regarded as the person who "will end the present order of things and institute a new order of justice and happiness."<sup>43</sup> Therefore, the Messiah was more existential in his approach to his divine mission than that of Jesus Christ. This does not mean that Jesus was not also concerned with the here and the now. The fourth Gospel shows us that Jesus was equally concerned with the future as well as the present. But the African Messiah accentuates the present existence then he does the future. This idea comes from an impact of African tradition. John S. Mbiti helps us understand this

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Vittorio Lanternari, *The Religions of the Oppressed* (New York: Mentor Books, 1971), pp. 19-62.

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Barrett, p. 47, citing V. E. W. Hayward (ed.) *African Independent Church Movements* (London: Edinburgh House, 1963), p. 71.

43

Barrett, p. 47, citing V. Lanternari "Messianism: Its Historical Origin and Morphology," *History of Religions*, II:1 (Summer 1962), 53

when he said:

The concept of 'the end of the world' is both absent and meaningless in African traditional life and thought. Everything follows an unending rhythm of nature: days, months, seasons and years; birth, marriage, procreation death and entry into the company of the departed.<sup>44</sup>

African traditional religion maintains that there is no "end" to this continuous rhythm and cycles, and there is no "world to come." People neither worry about the future nor build castles in the air. Time has no end. Therefore, from this traditional influence, a Messiah in an independent church movement would claim no future heaven, but would promise to change the present condition of life to make it better for his people. His concern is with the here and the now.

### Methodology

This research was not a field research whereby the conductor would go out into the field to observe directly and compile statistics and data on the participants of the independent churches. As a result, most of the information is from secondary sources, at least for support of my own experience and conclusion.

Though I did not go into the field to gather data, I do have some first hand information from my own reservoir of experience while living in Africa for twenty-four years, observing and sharing in the phenomenon about which I write. My primary source is my own experience

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<sup>44</sup>

John Mbiti, "Eschatology," in Dickson and Ellingworth, p. 168

as a Liberian, African churchman working and living with the situation and seeing directly the various ramifications and implications of Christianity both mission and independent churches.

### Outline of The Project

In terms of the format of the present work, I have divided it into three main parts: Introduction, Body and Conclusion.

The body entails three chapters dealing with the planting of Christianity in Africa, influence of Mission Churches on African tradition and the influence of African tradition on Christianity. It is within the body of the paper that I attempt to deal with or address the main issue at hand.

The last part which is my conclusion deals with the destiny of the Christian church in Africa. After a brief summary of the preceding chapters, I have presented what I believe is the possible future of the Christian church in Africa.

At the end of this study, I have provided my readers with a bibliography of the sources used in the text. In addition I have listed other sources not used but equally valuable to the study and of interest to the reader.

## CHAPTER II

### THE PLANTING OF CHRISTIANITY IN AFRICA

#### Early Christianity

From the first century of the Christian Era, until now, Africa and Africans have played a very important role in its preservation and spread. Christianity has existed in Africa as long as the history of Christianity itself. Thus, John Mbiti, Geoffrey Parrinder and others rightly refer to Christianity in Africa as being indigenous to the continent.

Egypt: As legend has it, Christianity entered Africa through Egypt by the first century. St. John Mark, the Evangelist is said to have brought Christianity to Africa. Thereafter, it spread on to Ethiopia, Nubia and other parts of North Africa.

The early Christianity of Egypt did not permeate into the heart of Africa because of the many hazardous geographical situations of the continent. The means of transportation, and communication were, at the time, very bad.

Ethiopia: It was during the 19th century that Christianity actually entered the West Coast of Africa. In later years, the independent church movements began to reflect back at the Ethiopian church as a model for their own independence. It is therefore important to exam-

ime the history of Christianity in Ethiopia and see why the independent church movements look to it for inspiration.

According to legend, St. Matthew preached Christianity in Ethiopia by the 4th century. Another legend also says that the Eunuch spoken of in Acts 8:26-40, a treasurer of an Ethiopian Queen named Candace was the first to introduce Christianity in Ethiopia.<sup>1</sup> Father Francisco Alvarez<sup>2</sup> recorded some Ethiopian tradition in 1520 in which he indicated that the coming of Christianity into Ethiopia is the fulfillment of the prophecy of King David which says, "Ethiopia shall arise and stretch forth her hands to God."<sup>3</sup> The independent churches have thus taken this scripture as their theme as we shall see later. Nevertheless, the Ethiopians claim that they were "the first Christians in the world."<sup>4</sup> The question whether or not Christianity was actually brought to Ethiopia for the first time by the Eunuch is yet unresolved.

If we investigate still another source of authority on the issue, we learn that according to Rufinus' account, Frumentius, a man from Tyre officially established the Church in Ethiopia. The story is described by Jones and Monroe as being authentic.<sup>5</sup> Rufinus was a Latin historian who lived during the latter part of the fourth century.

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<sup>1</sup> Stanlake Samkange, *African Saga* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971), p. 88.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Ps. 68:31

<sup>4</sup> Samkange, p. ii

<sup>5</sup> A. H. M. Jones and Elizabeth Monroe, *A History of Ethiopia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), p. 27.



In the long quotation that follows we get Rufinus' view of Christianity coming into Ethiopia. It seems as though the account is about Christianity entering India, but let me say that it is really about the coming of Christianity into Ethiopia rather than India.

It is important that I insert the entire story as Rufinus himself wrote it because it is difficult to summarize the story without distorting its content in part. Rufinus wrote:

One Metrodorus, a philosopher, is said to have penetrated to further India in order to view place and see the world. Inspired by his example, one Meropius, a philosopher of Tyre, wished to visit India with a similar object, taking with him two small boys who were related to him and whom he was educating in humane studies. The younger of these was called Aedesius, the other Frumentius. When, having seen and taken note of what his soul fed upon, the philosopher had begun to return, the ship on which he travelled put in for water or some other necessary at a certain port. It is the custom of the barbarians of these parts that, if ever the neighboring tribes reported that their treaty with the Romans is broken, all Romans found among them should be massacred. The philosopher's ship was boarded; all with himself were put to the sword. The boys were found studying under a tree and preparing their lessons, and, preserved by the mercy of the barbarians, were taken to the king. He made one of them, Aedesius, his cupbearer. Frumentius, whom he had perceived to be sagacious and prudent, he made his treasurer and secretary. Thereafter they were held in great honour and affection by the king. The king died, leaving his wife with an infant son as heir of the bereaved kingdom. He gave the young men liberty to do what they pleased but the queen besought them with tears, since she had no more faithful subjects in the whole kingdom, to share with her the cares of governing the kingdom until her son should grow up, especially Frumentius, whose ability was equal to guiding the kingdom--for the other, though loyal and honest of heart, was simple. While they lived there and Frumentius held the reins of government in his hands, God stirred up his heart and he began to search out with care those of the Roman merchants who were Christians and to give them great influence and to urge them to establish in various places conventicles to which they might resort for prayer in the Roman manner. He himself, moreover, did the same and so encouraged the others, attracting them with his favour and his benefits, providing them with whatever was needed, supplying sites for building and other necessities, and in every way promoting the growth of the seed of Christianity in the country. When the prince for whom they exercised the

regency had grown up, they completed and faithfully delivered over their trust, and though the queen and her son sought greatly to detain them and begged them to remain, returned to the Roman Empire. Aedesius hastened to Tyre to revisit his parents and relatives. Frumentius went to Alexandria, saying that it was not right to hide the work of God. He laid the whole affair before the bishop and urged him to look for some worthy man to send as bishop over the many Christians already congregated and the churches built on barbarian soil. Then Athanasius (for he had recently assumed the episcopate), having carefully weighed and considered Frumentius' words and deeds, declared in a council of the priests: 'What other man shall we find in whom the Spirit of God is as in thee, who can accomplish these things.' And he consecrated him and bade him return in the grace of God whence he had come. And when he had arrived in India as bishop, such grace is said to have been given to him by God that apostolic miracles were wrought by him and a countless number of barbarians were converted by him to the faith. From which time Christian peoples and churches have been created in the part of India, and the priesthood has begun. These facts I know not from vulgar report but from the mouth of Aedesius himself, who had been Frumentius' companion and was later made a priest in Tyre.<sup>6</sup>

Due to the strategic location of Ethiopia, the church was able to accelerate its growth without much interference from the outside world. At the beginning of the sixth century, missionary activities and support of the king kept the church in relatively good position. By the year 500, nine Roman Saints, sometimes referred to as Byzantine monks established monasteries in Ethiopia. According to Parrinder, they also translated the New Testament into the Ge'ez language.<sup>7</sup> Shortly after, they built a cathedral at Axum when the court became Christian.

A Solomonid dynasty was established in 1270 and through its influence, the Christian faith became dominant in the state. Taddesse Tamrat says that "Yikunno-'Amlak founded the new Christian dynasty in the kingdom." From written sources, this Christian church was basically

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<sup>6</sup> Jones and Monroe, pp. 26-27.

<sup>7</sup> Geoffrey Parrinder, *Religion in Africa* (New York: Praeger, 1969), p. 115.

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in the highlands. We are not certain about the exact time for the conversion of the central part of Ethiopia.

But it is not impossible to conclude that, since the political rule of Axum included much of the area of present Ethiopia and since there existed a constant flow of trade between Axum and the interior, Christian communities possibly existed along the trade routes.

By the seventh century of the Christian era, the Muslim Arabs entered Africa, sweeping through Egypt by 639 and penetrating the continent from the north.<sup>10</sup> "Arabs did not begin to penetrate the desert in the east until after the collapse of the Nubian Christian Kingdom of Dongola in the fourteenth century."<sup>11</sup> The expansion of the Arabs' movement reduced the Christian church considerably. Even at that, there were still some adherents of the Church in parts of Egypt and Ethiopia. As Mbiti put it:

In these countries Christianity has kept its identity both as a universal Faith and as an indigenous religion. While it is a minority body in Egypt, the Church in Ethiopia has always enjoyed a leading and privileged position. For many centuries the Church in Ethiopia was cut off from constant contact with the rest of Christendom which partly helped it to acquire a uniquely African expression, but which also reduced its spirituality and left it with a conservatism extremely difficult to overcome in adjusting itself to modern time.<sup>12</sup>

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Taddess Tamrat, *Church and State In Ethiopia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), p. 68.

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Bairu Tafla, "The Establishment of Ethiopian Church," in J.B. Webster and Obaro Ikime (eds.) *Tarikh* (New York: Humanities Press, 1968) p. 36.

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Roland Oliver and J. M. Fage, *A History of Africa* (New York: Penguin Books, 1966), p. 67.

11

*Ibid.*

12

John S. Mbiti, *African Religions And Philosophy* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1970), p. 300.

In terms of what goes on in the church in Ethiopia, Mbiti still adds:

Round churches, many saints, frequent fasts and monthly feasts, a big place given to the Blessed Virgin Mary, observance of many Jewish practices, order of deacons, priests, and bishops, seven sacraments, a high liturgy, a powerful but rarely well-educated clergy, a Monophysite theology<sup>13</sup> are the main characteristics of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

Most important, Professor Mbiti goes on to point out that the Ethiopian Coptic Church is "truly African in sense that these features have evolved over many centuries and reflect a background that has not<sup>14</sup> been imposed from outside."

What is the relevance of the planting of Christianity in the North African Countries of Egypt and Ethiopia to the independent church movements in Africa south of the Sahara late after the 19th century? Is there any relationship between the Egyptian or the Ethiopian churches and the independent churches? The evidence suggests both direct and indirect importation for independent churches. The influence of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church until 1960 has been an indirect influence, but during the sixties and the years that followed, there has been what Beetham calls "Fellowship between the Ethiopian Church and Churches else where in Africa." He goes on to say:

There was in the nineteenth century one indirect influence: the knowledge that there exist a completely African church in Ethiopia, taken with the words of Psalm 68, 'Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God,' inspired those who founded the early independent

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<sup>13</sup>

*Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup>

*Ibid.*

Churches of Southern Africa as they sought for themselves a worshipping community free of white overlordship.<sup>15</sup>

From the statement made by Beetham one can now understand why the leaders of the independent church movements would look to the Ethiopian Coptic church as source of inspiration and encouragement for their movements. It has little to do with the form or the development of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. The importance of the Ethiopian church has rather profound symbolic importance to the new independent churches.

Africans in other parts of Africa who have always been under the control of foreign white missionaries especially in ecclesiastical matters began to develop self-confidence by asserting their "African Personality" and believing that if some Africans in other parts of Africa are capable of self-government in their church, Africans elsewhere can do like wise. They too can found their own churches and control their own affairs without white missionaries' supervision and domination.

In the efforts to Ethiopianize African Christianity and free it from Western Europe and America control, the independent churches even sought affiliation with black separatist churches in America. St. Clair Drake writes:

The West African Separatist and independent church movement was "Ethiopianist" in spirit although it did not use the word. During the same period, however, a similar movement in South Africa explicitly designated itself as such. Here, a group of preachers, some

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B. T. A. Beetham, *Christianity in The New Africa* (New York: Praeger, 1967), p. 7.

of whom had studied at Negro schools in the U.S.A., expressed their dissatisfaction with white missionary controls by setting up their congregations, some of which sought affiliation with the African Methodist Episcopal Church of the Negroes in America. The story has been told by Bengt Sundkler in *Bantu Prophets* and he divides the churches into two groups, the other-worldly non-political "zionist" sects that became affiliated with a white denomination in the U.S.A and the "Ethiopianists," who took as their slogan, "Princes shall come out of Egypt and Ethiopia shall soon stretch forth her hand unto God." The government viewed the Ethiopian churches as subversive; the missions defined them as semi-pagan and blasphemous, except for the Church of England which tried to contain and channel the protest by wooing congregations back into its orbit as affiliates of "The Order of Ethiopia" sanctioned by the Anglican Church. The term "Ethiopianism" became embedded in the literature<sup>16</sup> of journalists and scholars to apply to this particular movement..

West Africa: Now let us ask the questions: When did Christianity actually enter the West Coast of Africa? Who were responsible for planting it there?

Beetham tells us that "the first European Missionaries were Portuguese, bringing the gospel at a time when Western Christians were still undivided and all owed allegiance to the See of Rome."<sup>17</sup> This was in the 15th century under the leadership of Prince Henry the Navigator.

By 1500 A.D. the Gospel had been preached at the courts of the Kingdoms of Benin, and Congo, in one case with immediate response from the members of the royal family. A son of the King of Congo became a priest after receiving training in Portugal and was elected to a bishopric in 1518.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>

St. Clair Drake, *The Redemption of Africa and Black Religion* (Chicago: Third World Press, 1970), pp. 72-73.

Note: For more information about the Ethiopian Churches of the independent church movements see Bengt Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets In South Africa* (2d ed. London: Oxford University Press, 1961), pp. 38-43.

<sup>17</sup>

Beetham, p. 7.

<sup>18</sup>

*Ibid.*, P. 8.

By the end of the 18th century, extensive missionary activities were being spear-headed by the Protestant churches. The evangelical revival in Europe gave rise to the movement.

The British arrived at Cape Coast, the Dutch at Elmina and the Cape of Good Hope, South Africa. Along with these missionaries, came traders, explorers, journalists, and government officers from all over Europe. They gradually took root in the land of Africa.

On the West Coast of Africa, the spread of Christianity started with "non-white settlers from the ex-slave areas of the new world who were settled at Freetown in Sierra Leone from 1791 onward."<sup>19</sup> Impetus was added to the movement when Liberia was also settled in 1818 by some freed slaves from America. The Liberian group was not very effective in the spreading<sup>of</sup> the gospel. Most of their churches were built along the coast but did not penetrate the indigenous people who lived in the hinterlands.

The early spread of Christianity was a laymen's movement. Beetham remarked that:

In some cases it was twenty or thirty years before ordained ministers of their denominations came from Britain to minister to them. This first planting of a full Christian community among African was a genuine lay movement. Men took their faith with them to their new home and shared it with the recently freed captives landed in their midst from Dahomey, Nigeria, Cameroon and Congo.<sup>20</sup>

By 1896, that is 15 years after Sierra Leone was founded, the laymen had spread Christianity in many coastal towns in the Gambia, Ghana (the Gold Coast), Dahomey, and Nigeria. Missionaries began to

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<sup>19</sup>

*Ibid.* p. 9.

<sup>20</sup>

*Ibid.*, p. 10.

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come from Europe, America, and the West Indies. The spread of Christianity was a spontaneous expansion. At this early stage, the church survived without the help of theologians and clergymen. The task was left in the hands of laymen to spread the good news.

In the case of Sierra Leone, the first Protestant churches were established by settlers from Nova Scotia in 1792. They were Baptists,<sup>21</sup> Methodist, and members of the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion. For each denomination, there were negro preachers. At this stage of growth, the church in Sierra Leone managed without European supervision. In December 1795, England sent in its first two missionaries. They did not remain in Sierra Leone for a long time but left shortly. One left on account of illness and the other was expelled because of meddling in "government affairs."<sup>22</sup>

The Church Mission Society also has a long standing history in Sierra Leone. The society was followed by the American Missionary Association that worked with the Mende and Sherbro people. This Association was followed by the Evangelical United Brethern Church in 1850 working among the Mende, Temne, Sherbro, Kono, and the Kissi. It was not long after that the American Wesleyan Methodist Church also joined the work, but concentrating its mission among the Limba, Susu, Temne, and the Loko.

It was difficult to convert the tribal population to Christianity. As for the Creoles, many of them became Christians immediately.

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<sup>21</sup> Gilbert W. Olson, *Church Growth In Sierra Leone* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), p. 67.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*



The Creoles are the free slaves from the West and their descendents.

In Liberia, the Americo-Liberians are the free slaves from America, who have also brought Christianity with them from America, but failed to communicate the gospel to the indigenous population. This was the same situation in Sierra Leone. The Christian population of the Creoles was not willing to take the gospel to the indigenous people.<sup>24</sup>

While Christianity was establishing itself strongly in Sierra Leone and Liberia among the free slaves, let us see what was also happening in other parts of West Africa.

In Ghana, among the Anang Tribe as it was the case with most parts of West Africa, people of older generation resisted Christianity for fear of losing their social status and other tribal positions. John C. Messenger, Jr. writes:

The men in the oldest age category, for the most part, resisted the spread of Christianity during the first decade of missionary endeavor. It was they who made up the membership of the divining and magic societies and were oath swearers; as heads of families, patrilineages, and villages, they were priests in charge of shrines serving the members of these social and political units. Their resistance was based upon the desire to maintain their positions of religious authorities, and they held strong opinions as to the orthodoxy of Anang religion, believing that the acceptance of any elements of the alien religion would anger Abassi and provoke divine punishment.<sup>25</sup>

E. A. Ayandele, a lecturer in history at the University of Ibadan made this statement:

Except for the futile, feeble and spasmodic attempts by the Portuguese to Christianize the peoples of Benin and Warri, European con-

<sup>24</sup>

*Ibid.*, p. 106.

<sup>25</sup>

John C. Messenger, Jr. "Religious Acculturation Among Anang Ibibio", in Wm. Bascom and M. Herskovits, *Continuity and Change in African Cultures* (Chicago: Phoenix Books, 1970), pp. 286-287.

tact with the Bights of Benin and Biafra, dating back to the fifteenth century, was primarily commercial until about the middle of the nineteenth century.<sup>26</sup>

It was during the 19th century that missionary activities took on a greater expression. Christian expansion by missionaries was simultaneous with colonial occupation. And that left a bad impression on the minds of the Africans. I maintain that the worst thing for the church to do was to go hand in hand with the colonial powers.

The image that Africans received and on a great extent still holds, of Christianity is very much coloured by colonial rule and all that was involved in it. We are still too close to the period to dissociate one from the other. A Gikuyu proverb summarizes this fact very well: 'there is no Roman Catholic Priest and a European--both are the same.'<sup>27</sup>

In French West Africa, (Dahomey, Ivory Coast, Togo, Upper Volta, Senegal, Guinea, Mali, and Niger), Christianity arrived in the 1600's--six centuries after the Islamic warriors called the Almoravides started driving southward from the Senegal coast.<sup>28</sup> Notwithstanding, for many decades Christian Missions made little or no impression on those people until the end of the nineteenth century. This period was marked by an influx of explorers, missionaries' activities, hunters coming into Africa, traders playing the role of middle-men, journalists and other com-

<sup>26</sup>

E. A. Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria 1842-1914* (London : Longmans, Green, 1966), p. 3.

<sup>27</sup>

Mbiti, p. 302.

<sup>28</sup>

Richard Adloff, *West Africa* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), pp. 76-77.

ing from Europe and America. Christianity for the last century in Africa has been part of the history of the continent. More than that, it has made African history. It has shaped African character and given new standards of living, offered western education, and touched the continent's life at every point of its existence.<sup>29</sup> Especially within the French speaking nations, French subjects were made to assimilate with the French and become what Hargreaves calls, "inhabitants of French settlement overseas."<sup>30</sup> Since almost all of France was Roman Catholic, all her protectorates became Roman Catholic Christians.

The policy of assimilation of Africans by the French was also the same sort of policy carried out by the Portuguese. Hastings notes:

The privileges of the *Padroado* tied the development of the Church hand and foot to the policy of the Portuguese crown, and Christianity could not easily appear as other than an assimilation to the alien world of Portuguese rule and Portuguese ways. There is always an attraction at first in that sort of assimilation, but there is, equally, always a reaction later on.<sup>31</sup>

In East Africa, by 1876 the British Church Missionary Society was organizing mission party for Karagwe or Buganda. There they came in conflict and had difficulties with the Arabs. In 1878, the London Missionary Society started its work in Ujiji. While the Africans welcomed them, the Arabs rejected them because they were aware of the dangers of

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Cecil Northcott, *Christianity In Africa* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963), p. 23.

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John D. Hargreaves, *West Africa* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1967), p. 68.

31

Adrian Hasting, *Church And Mission In Modern Africa* (New York: Fordam University Press, 1967), p. 57.

## European Missionaries.

The same year that the LMS came to Ujiji, some White Fathers, a French Roman Catholic group also arrived. As Norman R. Bennett points out in *Zamani*, "Conversion efforts were of little concern to the Arabs, and the spreading of Christianity would not be an issue causing friction.<sup>33</sup> But when Europeans became commercial rivals, the Arabs had to react."

In short, this is a very brief historical survey of the planting of Christianity in Africa. I have taken the time to point this out in order to say that such a long standing history of Christianity on the continent makes it a rather indigenous movement. In spite of this fact,<sup>34</sup> some Africans and Europeans do not regard it as such.

It is out of the ancient Christianity of North Africa from which encouragement has come to the independent church movements of Africa south of the Sahara. The independent churches are saying, "with such a long history of existence in Africa, Christianity must not continue to be thought of as a foreign religion." Its European tone, methods of worship, liturgy, concept of the world, cannot continue to persist, especially in these times of awakening in Africa. For sure, "Princes shall come out of Egypt and Ethiopia shall soon stretch forth her hands unto God."

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Norman Bennett, "The Arab Impact", in B. A. Ogot and J.A. Kieran (eds.) *Zamani* (Dar es Salaam, Kenya: Longman, 1971), p. 236.

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*Ibid.*

34

G. C. Oosthuizen, *Post-Christianity In Africa* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), p. 1.

### How Christianity Spread

The spread of Christianity, especially in the West coast was supported by intensive missionary and government activities. For the Africans, it was difficult to distinguish between mission and government, church and state officers who all appeared to exert political and ecclesiastical control over the Africans in both church and state matters.

The personal account of Roland Oliver can help clarify the question about the type of power missionaries had. He wrote:

The missions became a power in the land, and not a spiritual power only. In Buganda, as at Zanzibar, the native political authority was firmly enough established to include the stranger within its protection. Elsewhere even the missionary who set out with a few dozen porters and tried to settle in a native village had to set up what amounted to a small independent state. He was recognized as a kind of chief by the headmen round about, and to a greater or lesser extent the Sultan of Zanzibar and the British or French consul were felt to be behind him, as they were felt to be behind any other head of a caravan manned with porters from the coast. The men he brought with him were under his jurisdiction from the start, and, as time went on, some of the local inhabitants, perhaps political exiles, perhaps fugitive slaves, perhaps tribal misfits, perhaps religious converts, would come and settle on his land. However much he might seek in his teaching to support the temporal power already established and to preach to the people in their homes and villages, these men at least would regard him for practical purposes as their chief and look to him for economic support<sup>35</sup> for law and order, and in the last resort for military defense.

In order to be accepted by the powers that be, one had to be a Christian. In order to find a place for oneself in the colonial system, accepting Christianity became a normal thing to do.<sup>36</sup> Why was the situa-

<sup>35</sup>

Roland Oliver, *The Missionary Factor In East Africa* (London: Longmans, Green, 1952), pp. 50-51.

<sup>36</sup>

Donald M'Timkulu, *Beyond Independence* (New York: Friendship Press, 1967), p. 15.

tion like that? Dr. M'Timkulu points out that "in many cases the missionaries and the colonial officers were fellow countrymen."<sup>37</sup> Christianity tended to mean privilege and acceptance rather than a message of salvation for all.

In the early expansion of Christianity during the 15th century, Roman Catholic Priests from Portugal were attempting to reach far into the heart of Africa but they did not penetrate the continent. They did their work basically along the west coast, the east coast and at the Congo estuary. Here is where the noticeable work of David Livingstone is remembered. Missionaries were not able to reach a sizable number of Africans because they dared not penetrate into the interior for fear of losing their lives to the Africans whom they often regarded as "carnivorous savages" who fed on human flesh.

However, within the three centuries following, the continent<sup>38</sup> experienced some sweeping activities of missionary infiltration. Both Roman Catholics and their Protestant allies came in from Portugal, Holland, England, Spain, France, and America to convert the Africans to Christianity. Others did not come under the auspices of the church. They came as hunters, philanthropists, explorers, traders, journalists, etc. As Professor John Mbiti put it: "Christianity, is very much colour-

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*Ibid.*

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Kenneth S. Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1943), V. 320.

ed by colonial rule and all that was involved in it. We are still too close to the period to dissociate one from the other."<sup>39</sup>

With the help of the colonial government and the missionaries, the spread of Christianity became spontaneous. It expanded very rapidly in the first half of the 19th century. Schools were set up (see chapter III) as training centers or bases from which the Africans became converted. These new converts became lay-readers in the Christian congregations. These converts became very instrumental in assisting the missionaries to go out and convert other Africans. Many of the missionaries could not speak the tribal languages of the villagers, but the African converts in the mission schools who had learned to speak the missionaries' language, English, French, Portuguese, or whatever the case, did the translating and the evangelism for the missionaries. Mbiti wrote:

...together with their African helpers, were devout, sincere and dedicated men and women. But they were not theologians; some of them had little education, and most of the African evangelists and catechists were either illiterate or had only little formal learning. These workers were more concerned with practical evangelism, education and medical care, than with any academic or theological issues that might arise.<sup>40</sup>

### Response And Conflict

The Africans took a positive responsive to these activities of the missionaries. They were enthusiastic to accept the new religion which was to prove detrimental to their own basic beliefs, culture and

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<sup>39</sup>

Mbiti, p. 302.

<sup>40</sup>

*Ibid.*, p. 303.

their tradition.<sup>41</sup>

One of the main reasons why the Africans responded favorably to the demand of Christianity was that as they heard the Old Testament stories, they discovered similarities between their own traditional religion and the Christian religion. The description of Hebrew customs, the sacrifices and the legal provisions showed resemblances to elements of their own tribal life. They found the Old Testament full of attractive narratives with concrete character and a story and powerful imagery. The idea of one God, the explanation for the origin of man and the universe, the fascinating proverbs with their moralizing application to daily life and the interest of comparison with African folk-wisdom all made Christianity appealing to the African.<sup>42</sup> About this, Oosthuizen remarked:

The stories are often like those of Africa, the sacrificial system is very much the same, circumcision is widely practised in Africa, some ritual prohibitions are similar, agricultural feasts have parallels in African life.<sup>43</sup>

It was only after many years of associations with the white man that Africans discovered that the white man's approach to religion, especially Christianity was very much "unbiblical" whereas Africans have a more biblical approach to life.<sup>44</sup> Western civilization was "far less

<sup>41</sup>

Hastings, p. 28. Also see Latourette, V, 320.

<sup>42</sup>

Oosthuizen, p. 169.

<sup>43</sup>

*Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup>

David B. Barrett, *Schism And Renewal In Africa* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 169-178, 268-269.



specifically Christian in content."<sup>45</sup>

Within the Africans' effort to accept the Christian faith, they discovered that the missionaries were deviating from the Biblical con-<sup>46</sup>text in the Bible and the Biblical way of life. Hasting said:

Something which is common throughout Africa is a way of expressing truth: the sapiential way. Proverbs, enigmatic sayings, mythical stories--these are the means whereby the traditional beliefs of African folk have been expressed and passed on. It is a way of thinking like that to be found in the Bible, and it at once makes of the Bible a book attractive and understandable for Africans. That would have been the greatest source of strength for the missionary, but it has often failed to prove so just because we ourselves have grown so unbiblical in our approach to religion...Jesus himself, after all, is the best of teachers and his approach was the African one through and through; proverb, metaphor, parable.<sup>47</sup>

Father Hastings helps us understand this issue more clearly when he pointed out that "Religion is not culture, and the adaptation of Christianity certainly should not involve the adaptation of Western cul-<sup>48</sup>ture."

African peoples...have been of a monolithic ideological type. Social life, religion, culture are all inextricably mixed, and indeed justify one another. The religious cosmology is expressed in ancestor cults, clan ceremonies, age-group initiations. Every aspect of life of a tribe is bound together, and to make within it a division of culture from religion is meaningless. It can truly be said that to be a Kikuyu is itself a religion. The acceptance of Christianity<sup>49</sup> is bound to produce a fearful social and psychological dislocation.

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<sup>45</sup>

*Ibid.*, p. 97.

<sup>46</sup>

Marie F. P. Jassy, *Basic Community In The African Churches* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973), p. 32.

<sup>47</sup>

Hastings, pp. 64-65.

<sup>48</sup>

*Ibid.*, pp. 27-28.

<sup>49</sup>

*Ibid.*, p. 28.

In his attempts to teach this "social system" called practical evangelism, the missionary was actually destroying the African culture. Most of mission Christianity, until now, is regarded by some Africans as a form of cultural imperialism rather than a means of salvation. Adloff says that it came as a white man's religion and therefore it is associated with colonialism in the minds of the Africans.<sup>50</sup> But Dr. C. D. Hubart, said, "Christianity is an Oriental idea in an Occidental world. Christianity was spiritualized in Asia, colonized in Africa, militarized in Europe and materialized in America."<sup>51</sup> Therefore, one who talks about Christianity as a white man's religion is not talking about the spiritual idea. He is talking about the colonizing and confusing of a spiritual idea.

Though the African was willing to respond favorably, by trusting and obeying, he soon learned the dichotomy in the message and the practice of Christianity from missionaries. But what the African could not accept in this type of intercourse with the missionary was "the racist thought patterns of colonial society that were anathema to him as an African. These patterns were based on an assumption of the innate inferiority of the African as a person and as a member of a group with no culture worth speaking about..."<sup>52</sup>

Unfortunately, hitherto, evangelism in Africa has been based upon the false notion that Africa has nothing to offer as a cultural or

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<sup>50</sup>

Adloff, p. 77

<sup>51</sup>

C. D. Hubart, Chapel talk, Interdenominational Theological Center, Atlanta, Georgia, Feb. 11, 1974. A tape recording in Religious Heritage of the Black World.

<sup>52</sup>

M'Timkulu, p. 16.

spiritual basis for the Gospel. Hastily conducted anthropological researches have given the impression that if the European educator or evangelist came to Africa, it must be to introduce something that was completely unrelated to the ways and wisdom of her people.<sup>53</sup>

It is also pointed out in *The Voice of Africa* by Leo Frobenius, that a nineteenth-century document printed in a Berlin journal carried this article:

Before the introduction of a genuine faith and a higher standard of culture by the Arabs, the natives had no political organization, nor strictly speaking, any religion...Therefore, in examining the pre-Mohammedan condition of the negro race, (we must) confine ourselves to the description of their crude fetishism, their brutal and often cannibalistic customs, their vulgar and repulsive idols...None but the most primitive instincts determine the lives and conduct of the negroes, who lacked every kind of ethical inspiration.<sup>54</sup>

The explorer Stanley himself remarked that the best description of Africa is that of "dark" and "darkest" "a place governed by insensible fetish."<sup>55</sup> Frobenius went on to quote a publication called *A Great Light Of The Church* as saying that "The 'niggers' have no souls and are burnt-out husks of men."<sup>56</sup>

The belief that every thing African was evil and that Africans did not have any religion was also accepted by the Africans themselves to be true. Even today, some of the educated Africans still refer to traditional African religion as "satanic," "paganism," etc. I call

<sup>53</sup>

E. Bolaji Idowu "Introduction", in Kwesi Dickson and Paul Ellingworth (eds.) *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1969), pp. 9-10.

<sup>54</sup>

*Ibid.*, pp. 9-10. citing Leo Frobenius, *The Voice of Africa* (London: O.U.P., 1913), I, xiii f.

<sup>55</sup>

*Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup>

*Ibid.*

this expression a result of colonial mentality. On August 2, 1973, a local newspaper in Liberia reported that one of the African churchmen had remarked that the purpose for wanting to establish a theological school in Liberia was to:

unshackle our unlettered brethren from the grips of satanic superstition, idolatry, ignorance and paganism through linguistic programmes so that rural peoples will not only be made literate in their various dialects, but bear the Gospel of Jesus Christ.<sup>58</sup>

Dr. John Mbiti refers to such statement as "misinterpretation,<sup>59</sup> misrepresentation and misunderstanding" of the truth.

Per Hassing has rightly said it when he wrote: "ignorance of the real fact created many false images of Africa, inadequate observations often led to exaggerations...Robert Moffatt concluded that the Africans had 'no religion'."<sup>60</sup>

Such brutal approach towards the traditional life helped pave the way for the schism in the churches in Africa today. The outcome of the response and conflict was the independent church movements for renewal.

Missionaries did not take the time actually to study the African way of life thoroughly before making their conclusions. A few of them who learned to say a few words in the dialects thought they had mastered

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<sup>58</sup>  
"Theology School May Be Established in Liberia", *Liberian Star*, No. 1047 (August 2, 1973), 1.

<sup>59</sup>  
Mbiti, p. 13.

<sup>60</sup>  
Per Hassing, "Christian Theology in Africa," *Religion In Life*, XL: 4 (Winter 1971), 510.

the tribal ways, therefore, they claimed authority on tribal affairs.

Shorter tells us:

It goes without saying that for a missionary bare knowledge of the language is not enough; it may even be misleading. There must be more than verbal adaption. Expatriate and African Priests and educators need to have a systematic knowledge of the local culture in order to form correct judgments about African beliefs and practices and determine their values for Christian worship and catechesis.<sup>61</sup>

Professor E. G. Parrinder quotes A.F.C. Ryder as saying that in Benin:

None of the missionaries 'came near an adequate understanding of the complex religious system they were trying to replace.' Not till the twentieth century have comprehensive studies been made, most of them by anthropologists, though there are some outstanding works by missionaries and administrators.<sup>62</sup>

The outward manifestation of African traditional religion can be observed and recorded by foreigners, but they will always find it very difficult to gaze at the actual meaning of the faith from the inside. One has to be born in the society before he understands and assimilates the religious system of the society. Another remark by Professor Mbiti helps to clarify the point.

An outsider cannot enter or appreciate fully the religion of another society. Those few Europeans who claim to have been "converted" to African religions--and I know some who make such fantastic claims! do not know what they are saying. To pour out libation or observe a few rituals like Africans, does not constitute conversion to tradi-

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Aylward Shorter, *African Culture And The Christian Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1974), p. 74.

62

Geoffrey Parrinder, "Learning From Other Faiths," *The Expository Times*, (1972), 234.

tional religions.

Most missionaries' approach to the indigenous Africans' way of life was negative. The "African was regarded as a child. He must be nurtured and guided through a process of slow and carefully controlled growth toward a time in the dim future when he would be ready to look after himself."<sup>64</sup> The missionary-African relationship was not a horizontal relationship, but a vertical one--a master servant relationship,<sup>65</sup> missionary shepherds and African sheep.

In short, the following are areas of conflict: community structure, land and property, laws and taboos, religious concepts, religious leadership, religious symbolism, magical concepts, rituals, worship, and vernacular.

In the African traditional life style, what was the basis of the community structure that was anathematized? First and foremost was the kinship system. In marriage and family life, the ideal family is as large as possible in order to maximize the size of the kinship group, and is therefore, polygamous. This meant that the ideal form of marriage was polygamy. All members of the community were required to be initiated in

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Mbiti, p. 5.

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M'Timkulu, p. 16.

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Bankole Timothy, *Missionary Shepherds and African Sheep* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Daystar Press, 1971), title of book.

Note: Some Africans regard the missionary-African relationship exactly as what Timothy says, missionaries are the shepherds guiding the Africans they regard as sheep of their flock.

some way, before they could be recognized as full adults who were eligible for marriage. Marriage was not between two persons or two individuals alone, but between the families involved. Bride price had to always be presented by the parents of the man to the parents of the woman as a means of uniting the two families in one lineage through the sharing both of substance and of persons. In this family life, sex was regarded as something good and sacred and it existed primarily for enlargement of the family. Sex violations were considered those sexual activities which tended to disrupt the family.

The arrival of Christian missionaries with their negative approach to this community life style resulted in a harsh confrontation with the indigenous leaders.

Concerning land and property, land was never a commercial commodity. Nobody in a traditional African community was entitled to a plat of land. The land was the possession of the entire family, both living and dead, and in order for the family to maintain its unity, it must maintain the tie with the land. This was of religious significance.

"What is sacred for one category of persons maybe secular for another. You cannot set limits to either the sacred or the secular. They are concerned with the same reality."<sup>66</sup>

What was the religious concept of the traditional Africans. This is another area of broad spectrum which cannot be discussed in full in this professional project because of the complexity of the topic.

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Shorter, p. 47.

Other writers such as Mbiti, Shorter, Forde, Idowu, and Harry Sawyerr among others have dealt with the subject of African religious concept in their writings. But let me mention briefly some aspects of Africans' concept of God, deities and ancestors as perceived by members of our class in African Philosophical Thought, at Cuttington College with Dr. John Gay. We generally agreed that before the infiltration of Christianity in Africa, the religious understanding revealed that the nature and hierarchy of the supernatural starts out with the belief in a high God. He is the Supreme Being that created all things.<sup>67</sup> Because every one believes in the existence of God, it means that there are no atheists in Africa. An Ashanti proverb summarized this point, "No one shows a child the Supreme Being." "That means that everybody knows of God's existence almost by instinct, and even children know Him."<sup>68</sup>

The High God is a personal God, and not concept. "Though there are no images or statues representative of the Supreme God, yet there are specific offerings to Him, such offerings varying in frequency from place to place."<sup>69</sup>

There are lesser deities and ancestors, which were created by the High God, but which are partially independent of Him. There is no general term which includes the High God on the one hand, and either the lesser deities on the other. The High God is perfectly good, the lesser

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<sup>67</sup>

Daryl Forde, *African Worlds* (Lodon: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 28-31.

<sup>68</sup>

Mbiti, p. 38.

<sup>69</sup>

Stephen N. Ezeanya, "God, Spirits and the Spirit World" in Dickson and Ellingworth, p. 41.



deities may be good or evil or neutral, and the ancestors are good although vengeful.

What were the activities of these supernatural beings? It is believed that the High God is the ultimate ancestor and creator of the family at its mythical level, and thus of the community. The High God sees all that happens and his power and influence are felt everywhere.<sup>70</sup> He is omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, and also immanent.

The lesser deities live in a non-human environment, and may inhabit rivers, mountains and forests, or specific objects within them, if they choose. Whereas, the ancestors' spirits live in a human environment.<sup>71</sup>

What are the relations of these supernatural beings to man? The High God is the ultimate authority over the family, at each of the three levels, and thus over the entire community. There are three types of lesser deities as well as ancestors depending on which level of the family to which they relate. The lesser deities and ancestors can reveal themselves to men through natural phenomena. Lesser deities can enter the human environment in disguise, particularly in the form of animals, especially the snake. Relationships with ancestors are maintained by sacrifice and verified through oracles and divination. Ancestors are good and protective to their living descendents, only punishing them if the relationship is broken by the descendents.

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<sup>70</sup>

Mbiti, pp. 39-41

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Much of the information here in this section were collected and compiled by African students in the class in African Philosophical Thought, with Dr. John Gay at Cuttington College in Liberia, 1971.

Religion plays a major role in the life of the Africans. These beliefs that make up the tradition of a people, any attempt to uproot them, will inevitably result in a confrontation. Because early missionaries were trying to uproot these beliefs of the African people, a conflict resulted which today are the consequence of the independent church movements.

Now concerning the question of symbolism, what did symbolism mean to the Africans theologically and socially? The term "symbol" comes from a Greek word *symbolleîn* which means to recognize a legitimate guest. No human being can exist and function in a society without the use of some symbol system. Even the very words <sup>we</sup> use for communication are symbols. In a preliterate society such as Africa, symbol becomes a very important part of the means of life as it is true with any society. It is through symbols that one comes to recognize meanings. Even the Scripture itself is full of symbolism. Jesus used the techniques of symbols to instruct people. But many of the African symbols that were used for instructions were denounced by the church as being devilish.

The theological meaning that Africans had behind the symbols is that it reflected the presence of God directly or indirectly through those symbols. That was the same understanding the Jews had about symbolism. As Shorter put it, to the Jews:

Every event was regarded as a symbol of the presence and purpose of God. They were not bare signs--external proofs of God's power or purpose--nor the effects of a remote divine cause ruling the world indirectly through 'natural law.' God was seen to be personally and constantly active in all events. As Chesterton remarked, for the Jews, the sun did not rise by natural law but because God said 'Get up.'<sup>72</sup>

<sup>72</sup>Shorter, p. 94.

Even today in Christianity, the cross is a symbol used to represent the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The theology of baptism for the Christians is that the water represents an outward sign of an inward cleansing. It is not the mere water that cleanses the sin of an individual, it is believed by Christians that God has already done the inward cleansing. Why shouldn't Africans use their own symbols also to express their religious understanding?

Now let us look at some of these African rituals and symbols.

Most rituals of purification are obvious symbols of the penitent's desire to be rid of an unclean state and they may consist in washing, sprinkling, or other forms of lustration. They may also take the form of the penitent getting rid of something, letting blood, spitting or blowing out water, throwing away a piece of firewood, the direction in which this is done may be significant. Towards the sky signifies that salvation comes from God, towards the west signifies getting rid of evil for ever by consigning it to the evil place. Other people may associate themselves with the act by blowing out water together, or throwing another piece of wood on the pile when they pass the spot, and so on. The most explicit way of getting rid of sin is to verbalize it and confess it--'get it off one's chest'. Thus women in childbirth and sick people confess their faults in order to be saved from misfortune.<sup>73</sup>

Rituals also help the Africans to accept the claims of society in the new state. The individual can express his conflicts and tensions through ritual, and resolve them. Africans use rituals of life's crises to provide them with needed emotional support. Africans do not necessarily distinguish between the magical properties and the physical properties or effects of a symbolic rite. Often emphasis is placed on the symbolic character of the rite when, in fact, physical and psychical laws are at work unbeknown to the participants in the ritual. That is

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*Ibid.*, pp. 145-146.

why in African languages there is often no verbal distinction between *magic* and *medicine* or between *sorcery* and *poison*.

Spirit possession has always been another major religious phenomenon in Africa. In all African languages, there is no word for devil. It is a Christian term. The word that is being corrupted as devil is actually the word for "spirit."

Spirit possession has often been condemned by priests and religious educators as being possession by the devil. This is improbable and incapable of proof, and it gives those who take part in it a bad conscience, if it does not cut them off altogether from the life of the church for years. Even when the spirits are referred to by people using the word for personage known to Christians as the Devil, it is unwise to assume that the spirits in question are seen as ethically bad, like the Devil.<sup>74</sup>

One of the crucial effects of spirit-possession is that the possessed is set free from all restraints to speak out freely and let out his emotions and express verbally his sin in seeking forgiveness. All Africans believe in the world of spirits. Because of this belief, some Westerners have called them "animists", but Shorter reminds us that "it is best to avoid this misleading term, because it is unfair to emphasize the belief in spirits to the exclusion of the Supreme being. One could call the Roman Catholic animists too."<sup>75</sup>

In chapter IV, I will deal at length with the issue of what these conflict areas have meant to both the church and the Africans. For now, let me conclude the chapter by summarizing the basic issues I have discussed.

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<sup>74</sup>

*Ibid.*, p. 135.

<sup>75</sup>

*Ibid.*, p. 58.

### Summary

Christianity entered Africa by the first century A.D. through Egypt. It is believed to have been brought there by the Evangelist John Mark. As a result of this early contact with Christianity, many indigenous Africans from North Africa began to play leading role in the new religion. Some of the Africans became churchmen and others theologians of reputable character, a few among the noticeable are: St. Augustine, Origen, Tertullian, Basilides, and Valentinus. It was these men along with some others that formulated the earliest doctrines of the church. Before and after the Councils of Nicaea in 325 and Alexandria in 362, Africans have had great influence on the Church. Some of the books of the Bible are believed to have been written in Africa.<sup>76</sup>

Christianity spread down to Nubia and Ethiopia. Due to the isolation of Ethiopia from the rest of the outside world, it survived the Arabs' invasion of the 7th century; thus, Christianity was able to develop and take on a unique African expression. The Coptic Church in Ethiopia is described by Mbiti and other writers as indigenous African religion because it has many African elements of worship in it. And secondly, because Christianity has existed in Africa for a very long time, from the time Christianity was in its infancy.

By the 15th century, the Roman Catholic Church of Portugal initiated some missionary activities along the east coast and also along the Congo estuary. However, this missionary activity did not reach any

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Hans Conzelmann, *History of Primitive Christianity* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1973), p. 115. Also see Sharpe, II, 170.

sizeable number of Africans in the heart of the continent. It was not until the 19th century that returning freed slaves from America and England settled on the west coast of Africa and started to penetrate the coastal tribes. This laymen's movement was supported by colonial rulers and missionary efforts.

Business men and travelers from foreign lands also aided the spread of Christianity. But in the real sense, it was the African converts themselves who took Christianity to their tribesmen in their own language or dialects. After the 19th century, the spread of Christianity took on a great momentum.

Three basic reasons that led Africans to respond favorably to Christianity are: (1) the Biblical concept of life, world view, and the Biblical understanding of God as creator and sustainer of life as found in the Old Testament were all similar to those of African traditional beliefs. (2) Christianity was identified with success in life in the new society that was being structured. Christianity meant privilege, power, authority, and social mobility. In order for one to find a place in such a new system, the acceptance of Christianity became a "sine qua non." (3) The third and most important of these reasons for Africans' favorable response to Christianity is that Christianity offered something unique through Jesus Christ which the traditional religion could not offer. The promise of a new life with God in Heaven made the difference.

Among the different age-grade levels in African societies, the younger generations were more responsive to the Christian faith than

the older generations who were the transmitters of the tradition.

The spread of Christianity became spontaneous. Yet, with all the responsiveness, there were areas of conflicts that checked the expansion.

The African soon learned that the missionaries' concept did not accord with their own practices and precepts. There were dichotomies in the missionaries' way of life and the message they preached. On the other hand, the control of missionaries over their converts and congregations created tension and unrest. Everywhere Europeans and Americans seemed to rule Africans both in political and ecclesiastical matters. The African cultural pattern and value system was assaulted and rejected by the colonial power and the church. In light of these conflicts, the church found it difficult to expand rapidly.

## CHAPTER III

THE INFLUENCE OF WESTERN  
MISSION CHURCHES ON AFRICAN TRADITION

The history of Africa during the past century or so has been influenced heavily by western mission churches. All over the continent from one country to the other, one can notice vast influence not only upon the people, but also on the physical environment.

Activities of western missionaries involvement in Africa were concentrated in five major areas. They were: education, evangelism, health, welfare and the campaign to change the culture of the people to western ways of thought. The transplantation of western civilization became an important issue to the mission. Now, I will deal with each of these influences separately.

Education

Lerone Bennett, a noted African author born in the United States made a statement which seems very appropriate at this point. He wrote:

The question of education for black people...is a question of life and death. It is a political question. A question of power. The power to name, to define and control minds, He who controls minds has little or nothing to fear from bodies.<sup>1</sup>

So it was with such conviction that undergirded the western colonial education, to train Africans to act in the interest of the west

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<sup>1</sup> Brother Owusu Sadaukai (Howard Fuller) "Black Education: A Tool For Liberation of African People," in Priscilla Massie (ed.) *Black Faith And Black Solidarity* (New York: Friendship Press, 1973), p. 75. citing Lerone Bennett, Jr., *The Negro Mood* (Chicago: Johnson, 1964)



and reflect the realities and values of the west. "Henry Venn's three-self formula of self-support, self-government and self-expansion was changed by others into 'to make the African civilized in his ways, Christian in his beliefs and English in his language.'<sup>2</sup>"

Julius K. Nyerere, one of the prominent African leaders and also a spokesman for Africa remarks:

Colonial education in this country (Tanzania) was therefore not transmitting the values and knowledge of Tanzanian society from one generation to the next; it was a deliberate attempt to change those values and to replace traditional knowledge by the knowledge from a different society. It was thus a part of a deliberate attempt to effect a revolution in the society; to make it into a colonial society which accepted its status and which was an efficient adjunct to the governing power. Its failure to achieve these ends does not mean that it was without an influence on the attitudes, ideas, and knowledge of the people who experienced it. Nor does that failure imply that the education provided in colonial days is automatically relevant for the<sup>3</sup> purposes of a free people committed to the principle of equality.

Brother Owusu, in his remark about colonial education, said:

There are serious implication in this kind of educational process for many black people. Clearly, one of the great destroyers of black minds has been the so-called church school. These schools have been set up not only to teach black people the validity of the protestant Ethic or the Catholic Ethic (ultimately the same thing in terms of its relationship to black people because they both are supporters of white nationalism), but also to turn black people into a peaceful, loving people in spite of the constant violence and hate being perpetrated against them. Church school have been used constantly to give support and guidance to European interests, while hiding under the guise of 'Christian responsibility.' It must become clear that the educational process cannot be left in<sup>4</sup> the hands of the enemies, be it the church or a private foundation.

<sup>2</sup>

G. C. Oosthuizen, *Post Christianity In Africa* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), p. 3.

<sup>3</sup>

Julius K. Nyerere, *Ujamaa: Essays On Socialism* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 47.

<sup>4</sup>

Sadaukai, p. 83.

This statement above made by brother Sadaukai may be regarded by some individuals as an over statement and by others as the real fact. Be it as it may, such a statement helps us understand the nature of the problem which has resulted in the rise of the independent church movements. Such statement cannot be taken lightly by the church if church sponsored schools are to continue as part of the church's ministry to the African people.

Another criticism comes from Kwame Nkrumah when he stated that in many cases, the educational system brought by westerners was designed with intention to brain-wash the African and keep him from knowing himself. That is, from being made aware of the oppressive forces upon him. He learned western philosophical thoughts and western problems, but about himself, he knew nothing. Kwame Nkrumah makes the point that:

A colonial student does not by origin belong to the intellectual history in which the university philosophers are such impressive landmarks. The colonial student can be so seduced by these attempts to give a philosophical account of the universe, that he surrenders his whole personality to them. When he does this, he loses sight of the fundamental social fact that he is a colonial subject. In this way, he omits to draw from his education and from the concern displayed by the great philosophers for human problems, anything which he might relate to the very real problem of colonial domination, which, as it happens, conditions the immediate life of every colonized African.<sup>5</sup>

Another black scholar, Gayraud S. Wilmore, makes a remark which must be considered with all degree of seriousness. He said:

It happened that the nations of the Christian West were the ones to enslave the African and separate him from his ancient religion. Indeed, the Christian religion was used by the white man as an instru-

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Kwame Nkrumah, *Consciencism* (New York: Modern Reader, 1970), p. 3.

ment of control, and its pronouncements of the Brotherhood of Man and the Fatherhood of God were perverted to justify the paternalistic dominance of colored peoples as the Manifest Destiny of the superior white race.<sup>6</sup>

Education was given top priority in missionary programs. This new form of education was not the same as the previous education to which the African was accustomed. It was different. M. Kiwanuka says:

Among Africans, it was usual for young people to attend meetings of elders and listen to discussions and even to disputes. The elders would also tell the history of their ancestors, and in this way the young people learned the history, the laws and customs of their own societies, and appreciated their values. This was one kind of education. The Western type of education in Uganda was introduced by the Christian Missionaries as an essential part of the process of conversion to Christianity. Inevitably therefore the first schools were Christian schools and were for the sons of chiefs.

In other parts of the continent like the countries of West Africa, the system of education had been through the bush schools referred to as "Poro" or "Sande" schools and sometimes "the secret society." This institution was very powerful; it united the living men of the tribe with the ancestral spirits. Its head officials might wear the carved black masks through which they controlled the members, conducted the initiation ceremonies for the boys at their coming of age, and exercised functions of tribal control.

At the beginning, the tribal chiefs and villagers resented the western mission education. Concerning tribal educational systems and that of the western school in Sierra Leone, Gilbert W. Olson remarked:

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<sup>6</sup> Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Religion And Black Radicalism* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1972), pp. 130-131.

<sup>7</sup> M. S.M. Kiwanuka, "Uganda Under the British," in B.A. Ogot and J.A. Kieran (eds.) *Zamani* (Dar es Salaam, Kenya: Longman, 1969), p. 322.

But in the 1800's this did not bother the tribes people in the colony because they did not want to become western and therefore did not want western education. They had their own "schools" which prepared their children to become responsible adults and according to their way of life: the Poro Society for boys and the Sande for girls. In time, however, the tribes people began to see that a knowledge of basic English was necessary in order to live successfully<sup>8</sup> in Freetown. By 1900 they wanted their children sent to school.

In most cases, the instruction did not extend beyond the elementary level. Fourth or third grade education was sufficient at the time. There gradually came to be a formation of a new class of Africans--the so-called 'educated' class who associated freely with the white man in prayer, and in church government. A *de facto* segregation resulted, a mass of African members were widely separated from their fellow Christians in "education, culture, occupation, economy, and residential status."<sup>9</sup>

The educated Africans lost their identity with their own people. The missionaries taught them on the campus that they were now saved from the devil, and through baptism, missionaries christened them western names such as John, Peter, Joseph, Andrew, Lawrence, etc. These were names without the rich and sometimes mystical meaning for the Africans. The new western names acquired were intended to set the bearer apart as a new person.

In some instances, Africans were given western names because

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<sup>8</sup>  
Gilbert W. Olson, *Church Growth In Sierra Leone* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), p. 33.

<sup>9</sup>  
Leo Kuper, "Structural Discontinuities in African Towns: Some Aspects of Racial Pluralism," in Horace Miner (ed.) *The City In Modern Africa* (London: Praeger, 1967), p. 147.

missionaries had difficulties pronouncing the long and strange African names they bore. In other instances, non-Christians also took on Christian names to identify with the system if they wanted success.

In other places in Africa like Kenya for example, the African form of education was denounced by the missionaries and the government as illegal. Jomo Kenyatta has this to say about it.

In 1931 a conference on African children was held in Geneva under the auspices of the Save the Children Fund. In this conference several European delegates urged that the time was ripe when this "barbarous custom" should be abolished, and that, like all other "heathen" customs, it could be abolished at once by law. That it was the duty of the conference, for the sake of the African children, to call upon the Governments under which the customs of this nature were practised to pass laws making it a criminal offence for anyone who should be found guilty of practising the custom of clitoridectomy.<sup>10</sup>

What was the significance of circumcision and clitoridectomy in African society? As I pointed out in chapter II, many of these traditional practices have deeper symbolic meanings.

The cutting of the skin from the sexual organs symbolizes and dramatizes separation from childhood: it is parallel to the cutting of the umbilical cord when the child is born. The sexual organ attaches the child to the state of ignorance, the state of inactivity and the state of potential impotence (asexuality). But once that link is severed, the young person is free from that state of ignorance and inactivity. He is born into another state, which is the state of knowledge, of activity, of reproduction. So long as a person is not initiated, he cannot get married and he is not supposed to reproduce or bear children. The shedding of his blood into the ground binds him mystically to the living-dead who are symbolically living in the ground, or are reached at least through the pouring of libation on to the ground. It is the blood of new birth. The physical pain which the children are encouraged to endure, is the beginning of training them for difficulties and sufferings of later

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Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mt. Kenya* (New York: Random House, 1965), pp. 226-227.

What is educational about this kind of practice? Well it must be understood here that during the period of the initiation ceremonies, which varies from tribe to tribe, teachers instruct the girls about the social and ethical matters of the tribe. The instruction includes:

how to sleep with their husbands, when to refrain from sexual intercourse during pregnancy and up to the time the child begins to walk, how to be attractive wives, and how to bring up children. The girls also learn the "proper" eating habits. For example, it is forbidden to eat meat and drink milk at the same time; children may not eat honey and meat at the same time, otherwise the bees would vacate the beehives. They learn something about weather, about being industrious, about returning borrowed articles, about being kind and polite and so on.<sup>12</sup>

Among many of the tribes, it is believed that "children of uninitiated women would become abnormal. Women who have not been initiated are considered to be still "children" and their offsprings are known as "children of children."<sup>13</sup>

In the African society, the emphasis is not on individual enterprise, but rather, community solidarity and corporate existence. Tradition is laid down by past generations and everyone is expected to live in accordance with what tradition dictates. To be initiated like anyone else is a "deep level of asserting the group solidarity, and one at which the individual really feels that "I am because we are; and since we are, therefore I am."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> John S. Mbiti, *African Religions And Philosophy* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1970), pp. 160-161

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 169.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 170.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 166.

In places like Liberia, "the government has not forbidden the poro and sande cults to hold their schools, but the length of time has been strictly regulated so that no child who is in regular school will be kept from class because of participation in initiation rites."<sup>15</sup>

The mission schools were established primarily to convert Africans to Christianity. Mbiti writes:

Schools became the nurseries of Christian congregations, and converts earned the name of 'Readers.' The same buildings were used as schools from Monday to Friday, and as churches on Saturday (for catechumen lessons) and Sunday (for worship). As we saw, it is Africans who have been to school that are most deeply affected by modern changes.<sup>16</sup>

What was the nature of these changes? E. A. Ayandele, lecturer in History, University of Ibadan, said:

Christian missions destroyed the high morality of indigenous religion without succeeding in replacing it with Christian morality. Manifestations they did not bargain for were the results of the results of the education they gave. Sexual immorality in Nigeria began earlier among the so-called Christians than among the 'pagans' and was common among the African staff. The mission pupils became arrogant, disrespectful and dishonest. Most of the parents in the interior of Yoruba land regretted that they ever allowed their children to be 'educated.'<sup>17</sup>

What Western education has done to the Africans is amazing. What Ayandele says about Nigerian Mission pupils seems similar to situations in some African countries. Take Ghana as another example. John Messenger leveled another criticism which the church must not ignore.

<sup>15</sup>

Joseph Conrad Wold, *God's Impatience In Liberia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), p. 39.

<sup>16</sup>

Mbiti, p. 303.

<sup>17</sup>

E.A. Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact On Modern Nigeria 1842-1914* (London: Longmans, Green, 1966), pp. 291-292.

He said that as a result of the mission education, the young men have adopted "stealing, lying, bribing, cheating, and even murdering."<sup>18</sup> The mission school does not teach them that these behaviors are acceptable to Christianity. In fact, missionaries, colonial governments, and even the older Africans themselves condemn and regard these as immoral, but Messenger says that:

This behavior actually has been fostered by the acceptance of the Christian concept of forgiveness. Both Roman Catholicism, by emphasizing remission of sins through confession and absolution, and Protestantism, by preaching an intellectual gospel of salvation through faith rather than good works, have implanted the belief that God will forgive all sins...Protestant sermons usually stress the sinfulness of man and the possibility of salvation through faith alone, while many Catholic priest, unable to speak *Ibibio*, pronounce absolution when unaware of the sins being confessed.<sup>19</sup>

In the traditional African life pattern, such an attitude as that described above was uncommon. Man in the traditional society was very religious. His spirituality or religiosity led him into regarding the dignity, and integrity of other people as well as himself. He respected the properties of others. But now, where is the self-respect.

This issue about the new morality brings us to the recurring theme of antinomianism or salvation by Faith and grace. In the New Testament, we find it in Romans 3, 8, and also in James 2.

Nkrumah, on the other hand says that "man is regarded in Africa as primarily spiritual being, a being endowed originally with a certain

<sup>18</sup>

John C. Messenger Jr., "Religious Acculturation Among the Anang *Ibibio*", in Wm. R. Bascom and Melville J. Herskovits (eds.) *Continuity and Change In African Cultures* (Chicago: Phoenix Books, 1959), p. 297.

<sup>19</sup>

*Ibid.*



inward dignity, integrity and value. It stands refreshingly opposed to the Christian idea of the original sin and degradation of man."<sup>20</sup>

In most of the schools, students were not allowed to speak their own vernaculars. They were punished for doing so. It was required that they speak the language of their colonial masters. Some of the children that were recruited for the mission schools lived on the mission compounds and sometimes did not return home to see their parents or relatives for nine months or more. Upon returning home, the children had become strangers to their own people and taken on new values; the white man's value. For the African, Christianity began to be identified with westernization and modernization. What became apparent were these:

formal schooling replaces tribal initiation; age-old agricultural implements give way before tractors and fertilizers; distances are shortened by the fast speed of machines; by and large descriptive or inherited status tends to give way before achieved status--the chief and his sub-subs bow out before elected politicians; sharper distinctions arise between work and leisure; salaried employment in industry and elsewhere starts to spread and more impersonal labour relations predominate; health improves through more varied food and better medical care; occupations become more skilled and specialized; civil services, established according to rational and universalist norms, replace the slow-going personal administration of royal courts and village elders; and endeavour is made to institutionalise the control of economic growth through planning agencies; self-sustained; diversified; larger political units become viable from the improved systems of communications and better methods of administration; and inter-dependence comes into being between communities that were previously separated from and independent of one another.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>

Nkrumah, p. 68.

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J.B. Schuyler, "Conceptions of Christianity in the Context of Tropical Africa: Nigeria Reactions to its Advent" in C. G. Baeta (ed.) *Christianity In Tropical Africa* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 204.

So one can see that missionary education was not only negative but it also had some positive aspects. It provided the Africans the awareness to bid for the end of colonial rule--in addition it helped produce African leadership in the church, politics, commerce, education, and even in technology. Oosthuizen says:

Involuntarily, missionaries stimulated national consciousness within the African which equipped him to fight for his political independence. But economically he is still enslaved. Ecclesiastically, he is still under colonial domination.<sup>22</sup>

Even today, one can see the impact of the mission schools on the Africans. Almost all the heads of state have acquired their education from mission schools. And even by the eve of our political independence in the sixties, religious and secular educations were overwhelmingly in the hands of Christian missions.

There are not many educated people in Africa as compared to the population of illiterate people. As Philip H. Coombs put it:

In many developing societies, of course, even to have gone to school at all, to have learned to read, sets a person apart, puts him in the modern world and gives him a special status. To have attended secondary school or a university, even without finishing one's course, may bring one within the privileged fold of the small 'educated elite.'<sup>23</sup>

As a result of this great demand for well trained personnels, we have been content with even the least educated from the mission schools. In Africa as well, "educational systems are falling far short of turning out the right numbers and combinations of manpower needed

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<sup>22</sup>

Oosthuizen, p. 7.

<sup>23</sup>

Philip H. Coombs, *The World Educational Crisis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 74.

for optimum development."<sup>24</sup>

As a result of most of the "semi-literacy" program or education received in the schools and seminaries, the preachers are inadequately prepared for the ministry to meet the demand of their calling. The church must face,

the charge of the irrelevance leveled by the young educated. These groups claim that the church is ignorant of the spiritual needs of the professional and middle classes in modern society. They claim that they get no spiritual or intellectual stimulation from the sermons delivered in church, which are sometimes actually directed against the educated man. The church has nothing to offer them, they say, so they don't go.<sup>25</sup>

In most cases, the pastors are not only inadequately trained for the parish ministry, but they are not trained in agricultural techniques and other necessary skills which will help them provide a full ministry for their people.

In spite of all the criticisms, it is a general belief that the mission schools are better than the government supported or public schools. In any case, it is very significant that general education as well as seminary education in Africa now be designed to relate to African problems and not be another offshoot of colonial practice.

### Evangelism

Many of the missionaries to Africa by the 19th century were very devout people. They were sincere and dedicated men and women who

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<sup>24</sup>

*Ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>25</sup>

Donald M'Timkulu, *Beyond Independence* (New York: Friendship Press, 1971), p. 27.

felt that they were being called by God to "go into all the world to preach the gospel to all creatures." Most of them were Evangelical Fundamentalists who went to Africa with the intention of saving souls for Christ. Evangelism was the theme at the time, bringing more men and women to Christ.

Though many of them were not highly educated, they were not theologians either. They and their African helpers, says Dr. Mbiti, "had only little formal education. These workers were more concerned with practical evangelism, education and medical care, than with any academic or theological issues that might arise from the presence of Christianity in Africa."<sup>26</sup>

#### Health

Mr. Bankole Timothy, a journalist from Sierra Leone writes:

In the 18th and 19th centuries missionaries were exposed to bad roads, bad water, poor communication, hostilities, inadequate medical facilities, etc. These were just few of the hazards they faced--this bears witness to the word of our Lord, 'he that loseth his life shall save it.' Such example of 'sacrifice and altruism' our African indigenous clergy ought to emulate.<sup>27</sup>

With these difficulties the missionaries were aware that the gospel could not be preached while people are sick. Jesus' ministry was also a healing ministry. To this end, hospitals and clinics were part and parcel of the ministry. In fact, the area of health and welfare were the noted areas of impact of mission Christianity. It had

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<sup>26</sup>

Mbiti, p. 303.

<sup>27</sup>

Bankole Timothy, *Missionary Shepherds and African Sheep* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Daystar Press, 1971), p. 31.

the greatest success in reaching a sizable number of African people through social services, not in the strictly "religious way." Many hospitals and clinics were established to attract many people to their ministry. Hospitals therefore, became very necessary because disease has certainly constituted a serious limitation to human activity in Africa.

Even today, diseases sap the energy and stifle the initiatives of millions, perhaps the majority of the inhabitants. In addition to the diseases of Europe and America which we have inherited, we also have other diseases peculiar to Africa--afflicting people on the continent. Some of these diseases attack both man and animals. (example: the tsetse flies carry sleeping sickness in man and nagana in cattle).

This does not only hamper progress of human beings who survive it, but even more, it is a catastrophic consequence for raising livestock all over Africa.

As a result of missionary impact, along with the help of WHO (World Health Organization), we today have the knowledge to eliminate or reduce the disease of Africa, but, as with so much else on the continent, the money and skilled personnel are still lacking.

At the time African diseases were classified into ways in which they are transmitted. First, there are certain diseases only associated with primitive rural life. A lot of African people live this life style--they lack adequate housing, water supply, and general improved housing, thus generating mosquitoes that cause malaria, sleeping sickness, yellow fever, pneumonia, etc. During the 1951 cholera epidemic in Nigeria, there were 600 deaths out of 5,500 cases.

The second are those associated with sanitation. Dirty clothes, unsanitary handling of food; these produce plague, typhus, leprosy, various worm parasites, cholera, and many others. The third are the diseases spread due to ignorance. Examples are: venereal diseases which include gonorrhoea, and syphilis.

The fourth are the diseases due to malnutrition, of which kwashiorkor has received the most attention in recent years.<sup>28</sup> This last category is the most prevalent--the majority of children in the second and third years of their life suffer from kwashiorkor. About 60% of the infants die within 2 1/2 years. At the present time, in most African countries, the average human life span is about 30 years,<sup>29</sup> and 12% of all Africans die of malaria before they reach the age of 18. The number of doctors is not commensurate with the growing population. It has been through missionary doctors that most of the medical problems have been solved.

It is in this light that missionary activities in health have been extremely helpful. Until we can produce sufficient numbers of qualified indigenous doctors to replace the few foreign doctors, the few missionary doctors will not be able to solve all of Africa's medical problems. Infectious diseases will remain high, the infant mortality rate too will still be high and there will also be a high death rate among mothers at childbirth in areas where there are no clinics nor hospitals.

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<sup>28</sup>

Paul Fordham, *The Geography of African Affairs* (London: Penguin Books, 1972), p. 30.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 30-34.

### Leadership Development

Some missionaries coming to Africa encountered difficulties with the problem of attachment and detachment. After working with the indigenous people for many years, they were not able to return home. They made Africa their home. To such missionaries, the words of Mrs. Winifred J. Harley, the wife of George Way Harley, the founder of Ganta Mission in Liberia West Africa, comes afresh; she said:

In view of the political upheavals in the world, and the urge toward nationalism, the missionaries' time is running out! Prepare future leaders in your country now to take over your responsibilities; lest when the time for change arrives you have no one trained and ready.' Stepping aside is <sup>30</sup>a hard thing to do; but at Ganta we were working toward that end.

In Africa today, some missionaries have labored for fifty years and still the local congregation is unable to carry on alone. Why is it that after ten, fifteen or twenty years of missionary effort in a given area, we must still appeal to supporting churches for additional funds and workers?

Unless a church can be taught the necessity of shouldering its own burden and facing its own problems it cannot be expected to develop even with the aid of periodic revival outpourings.

When native workers have been trained, they are placed on salary from funds available to the mission from its home office across the seas. The missionary, whose time and energies are fully occupied with the business management of the vast community, anticipates that here

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Winifred J. Harley, *A Third of A Century With Georgy Way Harley In Liberia* (Newark: Liberian Studies Association in America, 1973), p. 75.

will probably be his home for years to come, so he provides for those extras which make the plan comfortable and convenient. There on the mission station, he is the undisputed master over the establishment. Funds for workers, for native teachers and preachers flow through his hands. He hires or dismisses at will. If a native church springs up, it is under his direct supervision. He feels impelled to remain as director of this, his **sphere of influence** and operations, as long as he remains a missionary. When on furlough, he describes the progress made, the buildings erected, and institutions operating; the number of workers and Bible women employed, the number of teachers and scholars in the schools. He presents pictures of the whole project. He may even mention that beyond are further towns and tribes needing the gospel, and may make an appeal for additional missionaries.

After fifteen to twenty years of this type of work, he may wonder why the native church does not show some signs of standing on its own feet. The workers do not manifest any initiative. The people do not show any concern for the salvation of their neighbors, nor manifest a willingness to assume financial responsibility for any phase of mission work. He realizes that his removal from the oversight of mission would practically bring the whole project to a standstill, unless another missionary took over.

What is the reason for this? It is because of the plan he has followed. He has treated the people like irresponsible children. He has led them, thought for them, relieved them from all financial res-

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M'Timkulu, p. 16.



possibilities for years. He has unintentionally robbed them of those practical processes which develop strong character in any walk of life, whether white, black or yellow skinned.

Such a missionary has actually established a sort of spiritual hospital, over which he must be chief nurse as long as it remains. His life work has become a liability instead of an asset. He has sown his leadership and domination and provision of every need, and he has reaped the servitude and malnutrition of a community of undeveloped spiritual children.

This is what most missionaries to Africa have done. Though it is not all the missionaries that are guilty of this attitude, many of them cannot escape this reality. They have created a dependent situation. As a result, their work never reaches the stage where it can be left without missionary supervision. The Harleys were aware of this trap. This is why they prepared indigenous leaders to replace them.

This is what Winifred Harley wrote about their situation in Ganta:

Stepping aside is a hard thing to do; but at Ganta we were working toward that end...so it was that before we left Ganta we could see changes going on. In the hospital Liberian nurses, technicians, and clerks were carrying on all the daily procedures, requiring less and less attention on the part of the missionary members. Other young people were already in training for the more responsible posts. In the Principal's office at the school, Mr. Jackie Wrotto had found his rightful place....At the shop skilled carpenters and mechanics were directing the work and instructing younger boys. Capable men were in charge of supplies, tools, hardware, and gasoline. We could feel well satisfied.<sup>32</sup>

The successful missionary is one who has done his work so well that he is no longer needed in that area. He can leave the work to his

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Harley, p. 75.

converts. The missionary is not intended to be a permanent factor in the life of an alien people. His work is to make Christ the permanent factor, and himself to pass on to other pioneer tasks as quickly as he may.

The true measure of success is not that which the missionary accomplishes while on the field, but the work that still stands after he has gone. One of the many successes of Christian missions in Africa is the Ganta Methodist Mission in West Africa founded in 1926 by the Harleys. That institution is a living reality of great missionary work in Africa. Undoubtedly there are many of such successful missionary works all over the continent.

On the other hand, it becomes a failure if the work remains on the station and does not go beyond the mission compound.

In some of the missions in Africa, the work there is seriously hindered because there are just too many missionaries, and therefore, there is a tendency to let the missionaries fill all the important posts. Thus the nationals are not given proper responsibilities and so fail to develop.

On the other hand, from personal experience, I have seen too many Americans on the mission stations who think that their way or methods are the best. Consequently, the work must go according to their plans. All these attitudes help to destroy the work of the Christian mission Churches. This is an unfortunate consequence of the Western Mission Churches.

### Institutional Structure--Marriage and Kinship

The African society which had long been cemented together by the extended family and clan structure through polygamy, was broken down by the missionaries. The Roman Catholics and Protestants refused to accept polygamists in the church as members. They even refused to baptize them. J.B. Webster writes:

From the first moment professional missionaries from Europe and America set foot in Africa they were confronted with the question of whether or not the marriage customs associated with polygamy were consistent with membership in the Christian church. A majority came to the conclusion that they were not. But once this decision had been taken, the missionaries were faced with what many felt to be questionable alternatives--divorce, fatherless children, destitute women, and prostitution. Their dilemma was aptly expressed by one of the pioneers, 'It is true I have never baptized a polygamist, but I have never ventured to cause a divorce.'<sup>34</sup>

Adloff says, "their refusal to sanction this time honored African institution had been the greatest stumbling-block in the path of Christian conversion in the French West African countries."<sup>35</sup> The same holds true for all the countries in Africa; not only the French speaking countries. Christian G. Baeta calls this issue "a sore point."<sup>36</sup> Latourette, the church historian also added that:

Christianity hastened the disintegration of the native African cultures. In a number of other ways Christianity contributed to the process. Most missionaries prohibited polygamy. Many taught that

<sup>34</sup>

J.B. Webster, "Attitudes and Policies of The Yoruba African Churches Towards Polygamy," in Baeta, p. 224.

<sup>35</sup>

Richard Adloff, *West Africa*, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winstom, 1964), pp. 76-77.

<sup>36</sup>

C.G. Baeta, "Conflict in Mission: Historical and Separatist Churches," in Gerald H. Anderson (ed.) *The Theology of Christian Mission* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1961), p. 295.

the existing marriage customs with their bride-price, were wrong. Missionaries were especially vigorous against what they deemed sex offenses. And for this reason usually opposed the traditional rites by which the young especially the boys were initiated into adulthood. In doing so, they dealt a blow to one of the most influential forms of African education.<sup>37</sup>

In the African society, polygamy had been a normal and sanctioned institution. But mission Christians in Africa maintained that it "would be fundamentally inconsistent with the teaching of Christianity."<sup>38</sup> Therefore, polygamists were not received in the church nor were they baptized. This issue is yet to be resolved. The church has been called to re-think and re-examine the problem. An appropriate statement made by Gunner Helander must be pointed out at this time. His question to the Christian church was, "Is monogamy an inalienable part of Christianity, or is it founded on a historical development, a Roman-European tradition?"<sup>39</sup> Concerning the same issue, Tamaram remarked: "What have we done to the Africans in the name of Christianity? Polygamy which Christ does not forbid, we have fought against as the greatest of all evils, but divorce and remarriage which he does forbid, we have introduced."<sup>40</sup>

Polygamy is a feature of the African people and it is a fabric of their culture. In Africa, before the introduction of Christianity,

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<sup>37</sup> Kenneth S. Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1943), V. 320.

<sup>38</sup> David Barrett, *Schism and Renewal In Africa* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 117.

<sup>39</sup> Baeta, "Conflict in Mission.."p. 296.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

polygamy was a common cultural pattern. It has been and is still an integral part of the framework of the society. How does the church deal with it?

As previously stated, Baeta is right to call it "a sore point." The historical churches in Africa have made the dissolution of polygamous marriages an essential prerequisite for becoming Christian; consequently a man is usually required to choose from among his wives the one to whom he will remain faithful. Thereafter, he is required to have some sort of "brother-sister" responsibility to maintain the other wives. From personal experience, my own father, a chief of our town, could not become a Christian because he had many wives. The church rejected him and refused him admission into the Christian fellowship of believers.

However, other churches now acknowledge that a man can become a Christian while still involved in polygamous marriage, but debar him from baptism and/or communion. There are two ways of considering this. First, whether or not they can be justified in terms of Scripture. Second, whether or not they are wise.

What Biblical or theological source do the people who prohibit polygamy use? They generally base their argument on Gen. 2:24, Eph. 5:22-23, I Tim. 3:3,12 and Tit. 1:6. The Scripture does not provide us with any clear mandate on the rightness of monogamy with the possible exception of the verses in I Tim. 3 and Tit. 1:6. Therefore, any deductions about polygamy in relation to the Church are, at best, inferential. Arguments based on Gen. 2:24, that the words "the two

shall become one flesh," regulate the relationship between man and wife, does not, except derivatively, preclude several wives. A similar argument holds for Eph. 5:23-33.

Even the verses in I Tim. 3 are not clear. The argument here depends on a point of interpretation as to whether the emphasis should be placed on the fact that a church leader must be married, or that he should be monogamous. Furthermore, if it is legitimate to translate the greek phrase by "married only once," implying monogamy, does it exclude those remarried after the death of a first wife, or, a man who has had two wives but one of whom has died?

The Scripture holds a more charitable attitude to polygamists<sup>41</sup> than is generally thought by some westerners. One of these is the graciousness of God in accepting and blessing numerous polygamous Old Testament men. Undoubtedly, many problems arose for them through such marriage, but God was prepared to accept such men on the basis of faith alone--a basis which we seem unprepared to act on.

On the other hand, polygamous marriage among the Jews was an institution ordained by God and accepted by Jesus Christ himself. He accepted it because there is no Biblical evidence that states that Christ ever rejected the practice of marriage in the Old Testament.

Paul himself gave the Jewish Old Testament to his converts as an inspired book and used it as his text, and seems to have left his newly founded Churches with a simple system of Gospel teaching, two sacraments, a tradition of the main facts of the death and resurrection, and the Old Testament. The Old Testament thus had a significant place in Christianity from the very beginning, as was

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Oosthuizen, p. 181.

also the case in Africa, even though in many Churches it was not accessible in the vernacular.<sup>42</sup>

According to my own understanding of Church history and the New Testament Scripture, I believe that probably, by the New Testament times, the world at large had adopted monogamy as the norm for society. This would explain the absence of reference to polygamy in the New Testament, but there is still no New Testament evidence of condemnation of Old Testament saints in this regard.

Scripture does not give us a clear authority for formulating church laws to enforce monogamy on new converts. Acceptance with God is on the basis of faith alone, not on social organization. Plural marriages need not necessarily contravene Scripture directly. What seems to be the central issue is that more often than not, polygamous marriages are unhappy, conflict ridden, and produce sinful reactions and results. In another respect, the economic situation of modern societies necessitates monogamy. In light of the sinful reactions that might result out of polygamous marriage, and in process of the growth of the church, polygamy cannot be permanently a feature of the Christian community. But the church does not explain the situation this way. What it does is to try to say that polygamy is rejected upon Biblical grounds which of course is not the case.

In the next chapter, we shall see how the independent churches in Africa deal with the issue; but for clarity, let us see the implications of church laws against polygamy.

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<sup>42</sup>

*Ibid.*, p. 170.

What are the implications of church laws against polygamy?

Having briefly argued that the Scriptures do not present conclusive evidence against converts remaining polygamists after they become Christian, one must consider the wisdom of the church decree excluding polygamists from membership. But first, let us hear what J. B. Webster says about the churches' position. He wrote:

In 1857 Henry Venn, General Secretary of the Church Missionary Society and a powerful force among the evangelicals in the Anglican church, issued a memorandum which laid down the policy that polygamists should not be accepted into membership in the church.<sup>43</sup>

Upon this memorandum, the church's position on polygamy has been based, especially for Africa. What are the implications of such a policy?

Positively, it would be argued that such a ruling maintains the purity of the Christian community, freeing its witness to Christ from compromise with incompatible non-Christian elements. True though this may be, other results which occur may just as seriously compromise the truth of the Church's witness. It is always easier to operate within a framework of law rather than grace and acceptance, but therein lies the danger. A regulation against the admission of polygamists into church fellowship does make entry a matter of law rather than faith. Church members are, then, those who have taken the necessary outward steps, fulfilled the conditions, and therefore, are among those who have "arrived," rather than those who are in the process of transformation. Legal standing, rather than spiritual state, easily becomes the main criterion in the minds of Christians for their acceptance by

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Webster, p. 224.



God. A basic misunderstanding of the nature of the faith is thus involved.

Coupled with this doctrinal issue are numerous sociological consequences, some of major importance. For one thing, in a polygamous society, only some of the men can be involved in polygamous unions. Normally, these are the leaders in the community. Such leaders are almost always the strongest characters, the ablest administrators, and the most educated men in the fund of tribal knowledge. To exclude these polygamists, therefore, from church membership, would be to deprive the church of the service of men whose lives, under God, could be the most vital in the expansion of the church. Such a law could relegate the church to a backwater in the community. Alternatively, to force such men to dissolve all but one of their marriages, would not only strip them of one of their principal means of community leadership and influence, but it would also result in creating many uncared for widows and orphans. For the community, this could have tragic result. In societies where the Christian message has had wide acceptance, the mandatory dissolution of plural marriages virtually eliminates the principal means of gaining status, wealth and influence, in that community.

As I have pointed out above, in most cases, missionaries have often been too slow to open up new and appropriate avenues of leadership to men with potential. They have determined to hold authority over the new churches themselves. The combined effect of this foreign stranglehold on the development of leadership can be tragic. In odd

cases in the past, it has been a major factor in the death of a community, for it has virtually denied the right of the group of exist as a distinctive unit, especially in Africa, where community solidarity and corporate life is held in high esteem. *Depolygamizing* of African society has meant the communal loss of the will to live. Today, the pace of social change is faster, and while a community maybe drastically modified, it rarely dies. However, the community may often find itself handicapped without local leadership, and therefore overshadowed and dominated by neighboring groups, or sink into a state of malaise which leaves it vulnerable in other ways.

on the more personal level, too little consideration has been given to the status of divorced women. Normally, divorced women, especially if young, would have married. However, those churches applying the rule of monogamy, have usually discouraged the remarriage of such women. As a result, many have found themselves in most unfortunate circumstances, being beyond normal marrying age, yet not having the status of marriage women. Some have given their entire life to prostitution.

Regulations against polygamy are some of the chief reasons for the failure of many churches to make a significant impact on African society. Such a rule cuts across one of the foundations of the organization of the African society. Certainly in Africa, those independent churches which, in general, have a much more liberal attitude to polygamy, are increasing much more rapidly than the mission churches.

In Africa, some churches apply the rule against polygamy on

the presumption that a second marriage is not, in fact, a marriage at all, but a form of adultery. The basis for such a view appears to be the failure to recognize the validity of customary marriage, coupled with the conviction of the exclusive and universal rightness of European and American marriage laws.

I have heard a missionary express in public that the laws of his own country in America in this regard, are God's laws--a bold and dangerous claim. Such argument implies a low view of the local culture. They take no account of its value, internal consistency and general moral content. The attitude of the missionary has been, that the culture is pagan as a total thing, and, therefore, must be abandoned, rather than replacing or transforming only its non-Christian elements.

I believe strongly that the acceptance of polygamists into full church fellowship, accompanied by an effective Bible teaching program is in fact, an effective means of preventing the continuance of polygamy.

#### Mission Against Tribal Solidarity--Disruption

David Barrett cited at least eighty traditional features closely woven within the structure of the society which the missionaries tried to suppress. Again, I want to point out that it was this suppression that led the Africans to revolt and form their own Christian churches in which elements of their culture are being used in their form of worship, sacraments, and liturgy. The quotation that follows summarizes what I have been trying to show in this chapter.

COMMUNITY STRUCTURE--polygyny, family structure, the extended family, clan structure, lineage and kinship traditions, genealogies, age-grades, the status of women, the sacral nature of politics;

LAND AND PROPERTY--tribal land rights, ancestral ownership of the land, the cattle complex, the earth as a mother or female deity, fertility rites, rain and harvest ceremonies;

LAWS AND TABOOS--tribal laws, kinship obligations, authority of the elders, codes of marriage behavior, sexual mores, bride-wealth, sanctions, taboos;

RELIGIOUS CONCEPTS--mythology, the tribal world-view, concepts of power, tribal concepts of God, the ancestral cult or remembrance of the living dead, the concept of the sacred, the unity of the natural and the supernatural;

RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP--Priest and priestesses, prophets and prophetesses, medicine men and witch doctors, rainmakers and mediums, seers and diviners, reincarnation of leading ancestors;

RELIGIOUS SYMBOLISM--masks human or animal, religious dress, body markings, facial markings, use of kaolin ;

MAGICAL CONCEPTS---medicine and magic, black or white, fetishes and charms, universal belief in the fear of efficacy of magic;

RITUALS--religious rites at birth, initiation rites, circumcision, funeral rites, burial societies, trial by ordeal, exorcism, rites for combatting witchcraft and sorcery, ritual use of water, river cults;

WORSHIP--sacrifices, food offerings, libations, native beer or palm wine, drinking customs, possession cults, religious joy, ecstasy, emotionalism, singing, dancing and drumming, the immediacy of the spiritual world; and the

VERNACULAR--language itself in which was enshrined the tribe's soul, together with vernacular songs, histories and traditions.<sup>44</sup>

### Summary

The negative and positive influence of Western mission on Africans can be noted in the areas of education, evangelism, health, leader-

ship development, and the struggle to change the life style of the people.

In education, missionaries' efforts were both negative and positive. Missionaries tried to control the minds of Africans by training them to accept western values and reject their own.<sup>45</sup> Education was set up to train lay readers in the church more than for any other aspects.<sup>46</sup> Yet, it was this same education that enabled the Africans to bid equally for their political independence from white colonial domination.

From the start, the mission church did not concern itself with indigenous theology. It was basically practical evangelism. The basic thrust of the practical evangelical movement was to preach the gospel to all people.

Along with the Bible, other noted achievements of missionaries are their effort to provide health facilities and western technology as additional forms of the Christian ministry. In health, the church was most successful. Through missionary doctors, much of the diseases of tropical Africa such as yaws (Frambesia, a disease with skin, bone and nerve lesions, caused by a spirochete),<sup>47</sup> malaria, sleeping sickness/nagana, were minimized to a considerable degree. Along with health improvements, western technology introduced new methods of farming with

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<sup>45</sup>

Nkrumah, p. 70.

<sup>46</sup>

Mbiti, p. 303.

<sup>47</sup>

Harley, p. 80.

fertilizers, tractors, the use of vehicles to speed travel. It is important to note here also that much of this technology was introduced by missionaries of the late 19th century. More sophisticated technology was introduced by the 20th century missionaries.

Most missionaries were not prepared to develop indigenous churches with indigenous leadership. They controlled the affairs of the missions and treated the Africans as little children or sick patients. By not giving the proper leadership skill needed to continue the work that they started, much of the missionary work in Africa became stagnant and failed.

The independent church movement started to spring up as a result of over Europeanized Christianity and "churchianity." It tended to suppress the African culture and tradition that had always been the integral part of the framework of African society. The suppression or disruption was noticeable in these areas: community structure, land and property, law and taboos, religious leadership, religious symbolism, magical concept, rituals, worship and vernacular.

In the next chapter, I will deal with "The Influence of African tradition on Mission Christianity through the independent Church Movements.

I find no better way of concluding this chapter on the influence of western mission churches on African tradition, than with these words of Mbiti:

I see mission Christianity, therefore, as making real contribution and progress in Africa, in spite of criticisms that could rightly be laid against it. Such then is Christianity in Africa, with its

divisions and developments, achievements and challenges, responses and success, failures and drawbacks, superficialities and foreignness, estrangement and engagement, strength and opportunities, cultural involvement and undermining, without an indigenous theology and yet with a strong team of local and overseas workers. It is a force to be reckoned with, both in the villages and in the towns, in schools and in slums, in government and in business. Its adherents may be branded "made in Anglicanism," "Made in Lutheranism," "Made in Roman Catholicism," "Made in Orthodoxy" or "Made in Zion African Church of the True God" (independent), or any one of the multitudes of mission bodies and independent groups. But all these are the living testimonies of the presence of Christianity in Africa, whether or not they live up to the ideals or their Faith. The independent Church movements seem to get closer to African traditional aspirations and religiosity than does mission Christianity.<sup>48</sup>

CHAPTER IV  
THE INFLUENCE OF AFRICAN TRADITION  
ON WESTERN CHRISTIANITY

Causative Factors For the Rise of  
the Independent Church Movements

There are about six thousand independent church movements all over the continent of Africa today. These churches practice what is now known as "African Christianity." By and large, many Africans take a negative approach to mission or western Christianity because they do not appreciate the version of Christianity brought by the foreign mission. They are searching for an indigenous renewal of the faith. They see a discrepancy between mission and Scripture. A study done among the Luo Tribe in East Africa reveals that after many years of western influence upon the members of the Luo Tribe,

the time came when the Luo made a comparison between the behavior of Europeans and the teaching of missionary churches. The attitude of Westerners in regard to Africans seemed contrary to what their religions advocated and from that the Luo reached the conclusion that, if you want to succeed in the modern world, it was necessary not to take Christian principles literally.

From our own historical understanding of the Christian faith, this was one of the causes of the Reformation started by Martin Luther in 1517--the contrast between the Bible and the religious practice of the church. Luther's claim was that "Religion should be in harmony with

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Marie France Perrin Jassy, *Basic Community In The African Churches* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973), p. 32.



the national spirit."<sup>2</sup>

The Africans themselves see their movement as a reformation of an over Europeanized, over-Americanized, and over-materialized Christianity. They want to indigenize the faith, interpret, and apply it to give it a practical meaning in their setting.

Another reason that gives force to the movement is the division in the mission churches themselves. They are divided into Baptist, Roman Catholic, Methodist, Presbyterian, etc, and each denomination, according to Mbiti, seems to be proud of its founder.<sup>3</sup> To the Africans, it proved that division did not matter after all. They could divide and have their own religious group and still be proud of their founders too. As Mbiti put it, domestic products are cheaper than imported goods.<sup>4</sup>

A similar observation is made by Jassy when she said: (in speaking about the Luo Tribe),

Multiplication of missionary societies confused them. All white men were said to be Christians but belonged to different churches, depending on their national origin. Most Catholic Priests were Dutch; the Anglicans were English; the other Protestants, American. Differences between the churches were attributed to ethnic differences so that their very plurality encouraged the creation of independent African Churches, first intended just for the Luo but

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David B. Barrett, *Schism And Renewal In Africa* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 161.

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John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1970), p. 304.

4

*Ibid.*

thereafter theoretically open to all Africans and even to whites. So it was that missionary preaching was associated indirectly with the origin of the challenge to colonial power and the birth of an independent African Christianity.<sup>5</sup>

The development of the spirit of nationalism also played a major role in the schism. Africans felt that nationalism could not stop with political spheres. The state was not considered free while the church was in the hands of a foreign mission. As Cecil Northcott has indicated, the independent churches "are essentially part of the process of making up for lost time and of the struggle to create an "African personality" in religion as the politicians, like Nkrumah, are trying to do in politics."<sup>6</sup>

The Bwiti Movement in Libreville was also part of the "Nationalist movement in the late 1930's and 1940's. It participated in the organization of Bloc Democratique Gabonais under the late President Leon M'ba."<sup>7</sup>

Another set of problem for Christianity was the personality and leadership clashes between missionaries and/or colonial leaders and African leaders in the church. The rise of Kimbanguism in the Republic

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<sup>5</sup>

Jassy, p. 32.

<sup>6</sup>

Cecil Northcott, *Christianity In Africa* (Naperville, IL: SCM Book Club, 1963), p. 31.

<sup>7</sup>

James W. Fernandez, *Microcosmogony and Modernization In African Religious Movements* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1969), 11.

of Zaire in 1921 is an example of the type of clash I am talking about.  
<sup>8</sup> Simon Kimbangu the founder of the movement was originally a Baptist raised in the British Baptist Mission of Nkamba who was viewed by the colonial leaders as a potential leader of an insurrection against the British. Through government pressure, he was driven from the church. He founded his own congregation. His movement had spread to Chad, Gabon,<sup>9</sup> Central Africa and Niger. It has over three million followers.

Another major reason which accounts for the independent movements is the fact that the Africans have, in the past, considered life in its entirety.<sup>10</sup> The way of life was not broken into fragments and compartmentalized into minute units called social science, mathematics,<sup>11</sup> history, economics, or religion for that matter. From the African traditional perspective, religion was a way of life. Ceremonial rituals, sacrifices, marriages, the exercise of communal responsibility, and other forces that compounded to sustain and make tradition viable were embodied within the way of life without distinction. Yet, they had some religious significance. There was always a fear that to oppose tradi-

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<sup>8</sup> Vittorio Lanternari, *The Religions of the Oppressed* (New York: Mentor Books, 1965), pp. 25-27.

<sup>9</sup> Geoffrey Parrinder, *Religion In Africa* (New York: Praeger, 1969), p. 163.

<sup>10</sup> Bankole Timothy, *Missionary Shepherds and African Sheep* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Daystar Press, 1971), p. 16.

<sup>11</sup> Aylward Shorter, *African Culture And The Christian Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1974), p. 212.

tion meant the rejection of oneself and acceptance of all ill-religious sanctions or punishment from ancestral spirit and the lesser deities. Thus the standard and value of life was happier and more meaningful for the people. For life was religion and religion was life. Commenting on the Luo society, Jassy wrote:

In the traditional society, a Luo had no choice of religion. Being born into a family, a lineage, a clan, prescribed for each individual the ancestors to whom he owed respect and obedience through the mediation of the head of the line. The Christian religion, on the contrary, is offered to everybody and presented as a remedy for all the evils of the world, and the Luo were converted en masse. But these conversions, as missionaries themselves acknowledge, remained superficial. The majority of new Christians continue to live according to their customs, practicing polygamy, performing the traditional ceremonies of mourning, etc. and when a great number of them found themselves refused the sacraments, they gave up attending services and contributing to the support of the cult.<sup>12</sup>

In some cases, as Shorter put it, "Some missionaries have been content with this situation, in which the newly converted Africans obey the Church's regulations and attend Mass and the sacraments without really understanding what is going on."<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, "many African Christians interpret what they do not understand in their own way, and the result is a juxtaposition of two cultures and two religions." Or as Professor E. Boliji Idowu has said, this is one of the dilemmas African Christians are confronted with,

There is no doubt that the urgent predicament of the Church in Africa today is that of the apparent foreignness of Christianity. And this, as we have pointed out, has resulted from the erroneous notion with which evangelism was bedeviled from the start. By a miscarriage of purpose the Church has succeeded in preaching to, and in teaching, Africans about a strange God whom they have somehow come to identify as the God of the white man. But what has happened to

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<sup>12</sup>

Jassy, pp. 31-32.

<sup>13</sup>

Shorter, p. 66

the God as known to their forbears--the God who is the foundation of their traditional beliefs? He remains still with them. And so we have left them with two Gods in their hands and thus made of them people of ambivalent spiritual lives. This impedes the progress of evangelism; it also results in a very dangerous kind of polythesim. Indeed, African nationalism is already calling into being a political God of Africa in contradistinction to the God of the Europeans whom a prominent politician once described as a God of oppression, a God of greed and injustice.<sup>14</sup>

The foreignness of Christianity to the Africans can be seen in light of a religion that brought "vacuum within the people's concept. This is how Mbiti put it. He said that Christianity was a religion:

which was locked up six days a week, meeting only for two hours on Sundays and perhaps once during the week. It is Christianity which is active in a building. The rest of the week empty. Africans who traditionally do not know religious vacuum feel that they don't get enough religion from this type of Christianity, since it does not fill up their whole life and their understanding of the universe.<sup>15</sup>

On the other hand, Africans in the European church felt themselves as strangers in a strange land. They might have said, what the exiles in Babylon said, "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?"<sup>16</sup>

A Christianity which is based on books did not mean much for those Christians who could not read or write. Jassy remarked:

From the beginning the message of the Missionary churches was presented as a complete renewal of a way of life not susceptible to integration within existing society. The religion offered by the missionaries is based on a book and cannot be completely lived without a minimum of intellectual capacity and knowledge. Neither can it bear its best fruit among an illiterate people.<sup>17</sup>

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E. Bolaji Idowu, "Introduction," in Kwesi Dickson and Paul Ellingworth (eds.) *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1969), p. 13.

<sup>15</sup>

Mbiti, 305.

<sup>16</sup>

Psalm 137:4 R.S.V

<sup>17</sup>

Jassy, 30.

The hymns, tunes and tempo of the western music had little rhythm without bodily movement. There were no clapping of the hands or dancing to express their religion.<sup>18</sup> For the Africans, this form of worship was dull and meaningless. In the past, African traditional worship was characterized by sacrifices or food offerings sometimes in a form of libations. During religious worship, participants expressed their religious joy and ecstasy. They lifted their voices in singing accompanied by dancing and drumming, thus the spirits were made to prophesy. The Ambassadors' Quartet from Southern Rhodesia remarked in one of their songs, "Dandi" that "Africans are a religious people, a religion based upon the fear of spirits. Some spirits are believed to live in trees, in mountains, in animals, and even in one of the drums we have. Some spirits are believed to have the power of prophecy and special drumming numbers are used to make a spirit prophesy."<sup>19</sup>

There is now a transition from book oriented religion to ritual oriented faith in the independent churches. Sundkler indicated that even among the Zulus:

There is a correspondence and interdependence between rank and ritual. Protestant Mission brought the Zulus into contact with the form of Christianity which was centered round a Book. The independent Church changed the stress and evolved a form of religion centered round a set of rites.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>

Mbiti, 305

<sup>19</sup>

A recording of the Department of Visual Education, Joint Section of Education and Cultivation of the Methodist Board of Missions in New York.

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Bengt G. M. Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets In South Africa* 2d ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 181.

In other words, this is a change where the Africans can find what Welbourn and Ogot call "a place to feel at home," not only in worship, but in the whole profession and expression of Christian faith.

Missionaries to Africa were all too inclined to suppose that to translate the Gospel into new vocabularies was all that was required to commend it to those who use them. Coming from a culture which laid so much emphasis on literacy and rationality, perhaps this was inevitable. But the question at issue was not merely whether the forms of Christian, which had developed over nineteen centuries in Europe, were suited to the needs and understanding of Africans: but, much nearer home, whether the forms of Bayswater are suited to Billingsgate.<sup>21</sup>

Beneath the umbrella of independent churches, African Christians can freely share their tears, voice their sorrows, present their spiritual and physical needs, respond to the world in which they live and empty themselves before God.<sup>22</sup>

One of the claims Africans make against the western form of Christianity is that its bearers, the missionaries, introduced racial segregation. Christian missionaries lived in separate bungalows and did not mingle with the natives very often. The residential areas were highly stratified. There were distinct characteristics between white and black. There were extreme social differences between them. They were living in two separate worlds.<sup>23</sup>

It was rather regrettable that the missionaries preached a gospel about final judgment which pointed out that the world was coming to

<sup>21</sup>

F.B. Welbourn & B. A. Ogot, *A Place to Feel At Home* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 135.

<sup>22</sup>

Mbiti, pp. 305-306.

<sup>23</sup>

Leo Kuper, "Structural Discontinuities in African Towns, Some Aspect of Racial Pluralism," in Horace Miner (ed.) *The City In Modern Africa* (London: Praeger, 1967), p. 147.

an end immediately. Christians waited for decades yet the world did not end as the missionaries have predicted. African Christians, in their own life-time, saw many of their fellow Christians dying before their eyes when the kingdom promised them did not come. This was a sheer disappointment. They lost faith and hope in Christianity. To the Africans this eschatological conception is an alien theology. The consummation of the kingdom is now.<sup>24</sup> "In the African understanding of history, man looks back from whence he came, and man is certain that nothing shall bring this world to a conclusion."<sup>25</sup> What the missionaries did not consider seriously was that:

African peoples have their histories, but for them history moves backwards, from the *Sasa* period to *Zamani*. There is no concept of history moving forwards to a future climax, or to a better future, or to an end of the world. The future does not dominate African thinking.... Human life follows a rhythm of Nature which nothing can destroy: Birth, puberty, initiation, marriage, procreation, old age, death, entry into the company of the departed and eventually into the company of the spirits. Another rhythm is also at work: That of days and nights, months (moons), seasons and years; this also nothing can change. This two-fold rhythm of nature is everlasting: as it happened in the past,<sup>26</sup> it is happening now and it will do so for ever. There is no end.

Or as Perrinder says it:

If the idea of God has been enriched, in importance and in content, the presence of the ancestors is belief that has been contributed to Christian churches. Indeed Africa might even teach modern Europe of the importance not only of belief in survival of death but of the presence of the living dead. Then the Independents have greatly emphasized the unity of the spiritual and physical health, taken over

<sup>24</sup> John S. Mbiti, "Eschatology", in Dickson and Ellingworth, pp. 159-184.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 163.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 162-163.



directly from the old religion, but often ignored in Europe till the rise of psychiatry and even there not often linked with a living religious faith.<sup>27</sup>

As a result of this kind of thinking, African Christianity does not lay any emphasis on futuristic eschatology. The emphasis is on the here and the now, a more Johannine theology than a Markan or Lukan theology.

In short, let me say that above all these causative factors for the rise of these movements in these thirty-four nations in Africa, the basic factor is the missionaries' ignorance of African psychology, language, and culture. The color bar within the church also contributed to the rise of the movements. Other factors include historical, political, economic, sociological, ethnic, religious, non-religious, and theological factors. As Barrett pointed out, "No one single factor, then, can be considered as the cause either of independency in any given case, or of the whole phenomenon of independency in Africa....These movements have multiple causation."<sup>28</sup>

#### Rise of Independent Churches--Schism and Renewal

In light of all these assessments of the causes for the schism, we must now consider what the Independent churches have achieved in respect to indigenization, or renewal of Christianity. The information above was necessary in order to provide the reader with background un-

<sup>27</sup>  
Geoffrey Parrinder, "Learning from Other Faith," *Expository Times*, (1972), 234.

<sup>28</sup>  
Barrett, p. 92.

derstanding about the reasons why African Churchmen want to Africanize Christianity.

A closer look at these movements reveals several elements that they have in common which they have borrowed from the tradition. I must warn my readers at this point that in spite of all the African elements added to Christianity, what really matters is that this new approach to Christianity addresses itself to the people's actual problems, their psychological and emotional needs. It fills their lives with new meaning and truth. The forms of worship in these new churches have taken on a symbolic traditional past. Dr. M'Timkulu calls it "unofficial and unrecognized indigenization of Christianity."<sup>29</sup>

In order to know what Dr. M'Timkulu means by "symbolic traditional past" let us see what Shorter says about the African Churches' approach to the adaption to indigenous rituals. He says that:

the church will have to create new rites which are in harmony with the African mentality rather than attempt to take over and adapt ancient pagan rites....What really happens is that Christianity in one cultural dress encounters a non-Christian culture, and then tries to incarnate itself in the new culture. In doing this it challenges and transforms the culture. Two processes are involved: the 'undressing' of Christianity from the foreign culture, and the 'dressing' of Christianity in the indigenous culture. These processes, however, are simultaneous, since Christianity cannot exist without some dress or other. You cannot have a 'culturally naked Christianity.'<sup>30</sup>

By adding African symbols and rituals in Christianity, it brings the faith in harmony with the African mentality. This can be regarded as an attempt to undress and dress Christianity from western garment in-

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Donald M'Timkulu, *Beyond Independence* (New York: Friendship Press, 1967), pp. 22-23.

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Shorter, pp. 66-67.

to an African design vestment which Africans can truly see, know, and call their own. This vestment of which I speak should not be interpreted literally. It includes making Christianity applicable in all dimensions for the African minds to understand and identify with it.

What are these symbols? They are not just dead symbols of ancient tradition, or future and uncertain symbols, "but values which are meaningful here and now, and which are likely to survive."<sup>31</sup>

The Christian sacraments are *sui generis*, and therefore it is natural to assume that most adaptation of rites will take the form of constructing entirely new rites to give expression to authentically Christian ideas and purposes. These, however, should be rooted in local symbols. Elements taken from traditional practices will help to make the new rite comprehensible and relevant to the people, in so far as the symbols and elements are compatible with Christian belief and practices.<sup>32</sup>

Shorter goes on to support the adaptation of indigenous elements into Christianity pointing out that:

The second Vatican Council explicitly recommends this kind of adaptation: 'In mission lands initiation rites are found in use among individual people. Elements from these when capable of being adapted to Christian rituals, may be admitted along with those already found in Christian tradition.' (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 65).<sup>33</sup>

In the churches, drums, guitar, and bells are used instead of western piano and organs. In some churches, the sacrament of the Lord's Supper which had formerly been the eating of bread and drinking of wine or grape juice, have now been changed to indigenous food such as fufu, cassava (Manioc--*Manihot utillissima* var *hyptiaphylla*)<sup>34</sup> corn, bannana,

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<sup>31</sup>

*Ibid.*, p. 73.

<sup>32</sup>

*Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup>

*Ibid*

<sup>34</sup>

W. J. Harley, *A Third of A Century With George Way Harley In Liberia* (Newark, DE: Liberian Studies Association In America, 1973), p79

palm wine, etc. They, like the bread and wine of the mission churches, symbolize the body and blood of Christ.

Popular hymns have been Africanized. They have been translated into the vernacular. Moreover, the harmony and tempo have been changed by African congregations in line with their harmonies and rhythms. The final stage is reached when these tunes are used as accompaniment for dancing groups at Christian weddings.

To the Africans, language is not only important because it is the medium of communication, but because the songs, histories, traditions and the very soul of the tribe are all enshrined in the vernacular. To debar a tribal unit from its vernacular is to literally extinguish the life of the tribe.

But thanks to God, some of these songs and traditions of the tribes are being preserved and used in Christian worship. Thus, two things happen in the process. First, the tribe regains its life and it continues to exist, and second, the life of Christianity itself is re-  
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vitalized and accepted among the tribal people. Alan P. Merriam remarked here that:

The use of African music in Christian worship has been discussed by number of writers; Jones reaches conclusions similar to Carrington's while Hornbostel disagrees rather strangely. Another approach shows clearly that the acculturative process taking place between Western and African music are not one way alone. In recent years at least five different Catholic masses have been scored by Europeans with the express intention of incorporating African melodies into the liturgical chants; in some cases durings have been played as ac-

companiment during the services.

Mr. Nketia, J. H. at the Africa Conference at Ibadan in 1958 said that:

the purpose of Africanization is not the abandonment of Christocentric worship but the use of familiar means of expression to enable the African worshipper to understand better and feel more deeply. It should make use of techniques of worship already developed in Africa consistent with the quality and purpose of Christian worship...So the question for Africa is not only "is the worship Christian" but 'Is the worship African too?'<sup>37</sup>

Over 420 African tribes have translated the Bible into their own vernacular. These, of course, are serving as standards for judging missionaries and their missions. This is helping to see the alleged discrepancies between mission practices and Biblical liberty.

There are over 700 languages spoken in Africa--this does not include the thousands of dialects spoken by millions of people. Therefore, 420 tribes or languages seem infinitesimal to the total number of people still to be reached with the Bible in their own dialect or language.

As a medium of communication, Africans have adopted the languages of their colonial masters for commercial and educational purposes. The Bible translators are afraid that the:

African church may fail to communicate the Gospel to its own society, because it has learned the gospel in loan words from the west. Loan words can be understood by the intelligentsia, but they do not speak to the heart of the nation. They do not reflect its own spiritual struggles. Because of this, they fail to communicate the

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Alan P. Merriam, "African Music", in William R. Bascom and Melville J. Herskovits (eds.) *Continuity and Change In African Cultures* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), p. 82.

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Northcott, pp. 81-82.

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word of God.

On the other hand, Dr. M'Timkulu tells us that the political leaders who are advocating unity are telling the Bible translators to stop complicating and perpetuating barrier problems. They say that by immortalizing every dialect in print and providing small groups with their literature, one is helping to keep the fire of tribalism or tribal division burning.<sup>39</sup> For the sake of national unity, the leaders are trying to stop the translation process and detribalize their people. They say, the achievement of unity is not possible where communication is impossible.

Oosthuizen quoting Kraemer states that Language is also a theological problem. The Genesis account in which there is a broken dialogue between man and man. Similar incidence is recorded in Acts where the broken dialogue is restored through the power of the Holy spirit. Kraemer goes on to say that "fall and Redemption, Babel and Pentecost<sup>40</sup> are hidden factors behind language and communication." Only in Christ can there be real communication between God and man and between man and man. This is effected through the work of the Holy Spirit, who transcends the isolationist tendencies of a language. The necessity of a universal language does not arise. Apart from being impossible, it would also be impractical. This contradicts not only 'the actual, living re-

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G. C. Oosthuizen, *Post-Christian In Africa* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), pp. 235-236.

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M'Timkulu, p. 9.

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Oosthuizen, p. 238.

ality of language' but also the inability of man to achieve wholeness. The broken dialogue between God and man is at the center of our problem of communication--which makes communication thus a theological problem.<sup>41</sup>

As I have indicated in the earliest chapters, the African saw many similarities in their way of life as compared to those of the Hebrews. A study done among the Anang Tribe is evidence of this fact. It revealed that:

Similarities between the Christian moral code as expressed in the Bible and the indigenous one often are commented on by the people, who emphasize that murder, theft, cheating, lying, bribery, and many other acts are regarded as sinful by both Christians and Anang. It is difficult for them, however, to accept the position of the missions in such matters as polygyny, warfare, sacrifices, killing twins at birth, and repaying bride-wealth upon divorce; in these cases they feel that Christian morality is in error. Confusion is created when they read the Old Testament of polygyny and the sacrifice of animals to God practices condemned by missionaries, or when they learn of the many wars Christians have fought in the name of their religion. Especially bewildered are the World War II veterans who fought for the British in foreign theaters, yet are prohibited from engaging in local armed conflict because the British consider warfare barbaric and uncivilized. The Anang tend to support their own moral convictions and to disregard those elements of Christian belief which contradict them; thus a staunch Christian is likely to practice polygyny, if prosperous enough, yet believe that his soul will go to heaven when he dies, and Christian mothers feel no guilt when they attempt to destroy twins born to them in mission hospital.<sup>42</sup>

The killing of twins and triplets at birth was not a universal thing for all people in Africa. Among the tribes within which this practice is carried out, twins and triplets were looked upon with fear and those who were concerned viewed it as threat to their whole existence. "It was a sign that something wrong had happened to cause the births,

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John Messenger, Jr., "Religious Acculturation Among the Anang Ibibio," in Bascom and Herskovits, p. 293.

and that something worse still would happen to the whole community if the "evil" were not removed. So they killed the children for the sake of the larger community, to cleanse, to "save" to protect the rest of the people."<sup>43</sup> Failure to kill the twins meant that the entire community would suffer along with the twins. Therefore, the intention of the killing was not a bad intention, or "cruel act against the children."<sup>44</sup>

Let me re-emphasize here that this was not a common experience of all Africans. For other Africans, the birth of twins was accepted with "great joy and satisfaction, as a sign of rich fertility."<sup>45</sup>

In light of ethical consideration, such a practice should be condemned. However, I do understand that this was done purely from emotional grounds and from the point of view of the lack of knowledge of the actual dynamics of the biological process that goes on in childbirth.

Concerning the issue of war, Mr. Bankole Timothy has remarked that:

We Africans are told by European missionaries that tribal wars were unchristian, though it seems to have become the practice for Europeans to stage global wars every twenty five years or so. And what is even worse is the sight of Priest praying and blessing troops going to kill other human beings, though the Bible clearly states that "Thou shalt not kill."<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Mbiti, *African Religions And Philosophy*, p. 153.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 152.

<sup>46</sup> Timothy, p. 16



In the African churches, drums, guitar, and bells are used instead of western piano and organs. Only a few of the independent churches use bells to summon up their congregation for worship. Each church has a blow horn or ceremonial drum which is sounded every morning for assembling the people for worship.

It is important to note here that all the separate or independent churches affirm Christ as their Lord and Savior and that they also accept the fact that they are Christians.<sup>47</sup> They resent being called "sect, or cults." Baeta says that words like "sects," "cults," are<sup>48</sup> known to be repugnant to their leaders, who much prefer them to be known as "Churches."

The African Christian worship is conducted in small rooms which resemble their familiar patterns of African society rather than the large Europeanized mission Churches which are half empty on Sundays.<sup>49</sup>

Another noticeable addition to the African Christianity is that in practice (not theory) members go out to meet people where they are and the condition in which they may be. Polygamy is accepted by the independent churches. A man with many wives and children can be accepted in the church not on the basis of laws, but by faith.

In Dahomey and Ivory Coast, wholly African independent churches

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<sup>47</sup>  
C. G. Baeta, "Conflict In Mission : Historical and Separatist Churches," in Gerald H. Anderson (ed.) *The Theology of Christian Mission* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1961), p. 290. Also see Barrett, p. 278.

<sup>48</sup>  
*Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup>  
Barrett, p. 174.

sprang up in support of polygyny. William Harris, a Liberian Prophet who converted thousands of Ivoirians to his new doctrine in 1913-1914<sup>50</sup> was also in support of polygamy. He himself has several women who he carried along with him as his cross bearers. Harris converted more than 100,000 followers in those countries. He baptized them and cured their sickness by means of the Bible.

William Harris was a very prominent person in the expansion of the independent church movements. He had a very strong influence on his people when it came to both secular and religious matters. As such, I think it is important to hear his view about the question of marriage. This will help us to understand how some of the independent church leaders believe ideal marriage ought to be.

When Harris was asked how it was that he who had come to Axim with two wives now had the company of five--how could he have more than one? He replied:

There's no harm in that! unless you take her to the altar. Even if you have a lawfully (i.e, church) married wife I will show you the way out of it. Tell her, I have seen this woman and I wish to marry her. If she refuses to agree, call a woman messenger to deliver exactly the same message. If she refuses again, call a second messenger and send the message again. Then it doesn't matter what she says, because you have told her in the name of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.<sup>51</sup>

At another time on the same issue of polygamy when Harris was questioned, he remarked that "big men" are not bound to one wife as poor men were. That was God's law for the white man, but did not apply

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<sup>50</sup>

Richard Adloff, *West Africa* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), p. 81.

<sup>51</sup>

Gordon Mackay Haliburton, *The Prophet Harris* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 69-70.

to the blacks."<sup>52</sup> According to Harris, "God did not intend to make the same law for black and white people. Black could take as many wives as they could look after."<sup>53</sup>

Many westerners tend to misunderstand this entire question of polygamy. What was actually practiced in Africa in terms of marriage was monogamy--one man, one wife, but polygamy was not rejected. A Christian missionary to Ganta, Liberia West Africa says, "in general a man may have any number of wives. In actual practice many men have no more than one; others, two or three. Chiefs often have many; it is expected of them, indicates status, and forms useful connection with other important families."<sup>54</sup>

Another aspect of African traditional marriage which was borrowed by Christians is the wearing of rings. Sharpe says:

The Christians borrowed at the same time the old customs and the opinions; it was natural to do so. Of course many of these customs were wholly blameless. Such was the use of the wedding ring. It was a piece of money, and the Egyptian at his marriage placed it on his wife's finger in token of his trusting her with all his property. The early Christians saw no harm in following this custom, particularly as the ring bore no engraved stone with an idolatrous figure on it. And in our own marriage ceremony the man places the same plain ring of gold on his bride's finger when he says, "with all my worldly goods I thee endow."<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup>

*Ibid.*, p. 70.

<sup>53</sup>

*Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup>

Harley, p. 31.

<sup>55</sup>

Samuel Sharpe, *History of Egypt* (London: Moxon, 1859), II, 173-174.

The churches in Africa are not only rejecting the western values of the mission churches, but they are facilitating the modification of traditional behavior patterns.

The church of The twelve Apostles, for example, stresses the obligation of the father to provide for his children until their marriage, and of children to care for their father in their old age; these are radical innovations in matrilineal Akan Society.<sup>56</sup>

One of the Ghanaian independent churches "prohibits divorce among its members but ameliorates the traditional customs which widows are expected to observe, reducing the mourning period from a year to two or three months and omitting several repugnant rites."<sup>57</sup>

The influence of African tradition on Christianity is real not only in the independent churches but also in most of the historical churches. At least one example will suffice. John D. Hargreaves, speaking about the former French speaking states in West Africa wrote:

From the seventeenth century European visitors were surprised to see *griots* participating in Christian weddings, performing crude rituals designed to attest the bride's virginity. The catholicism of the Senegalese showed in its outward observances clear traces of the African cultural environment; its flexibility may in part explain its strength.<sup>58</sup>

In regard to baptism, some of the African churches use water and sprinkle while others prefer immersion. In some of the churches, oil or perfumes are used. They resemble what their traditional fathers

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<sup>56</sup>

P. C. Lloyd, *Africa In Social Change* (London: Penguin Books, 1972), pp. 261-262.

<sup>57</sup>

*Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup>

John D. Hargreaves, *West Africa* (Englewood, Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1967), p. 70.

did in the old days in anointment ceremonies. Aday, the prophet baptized with perfumes. He issued his own ten commandments including<sup>59</sup> "Thou shall not damage the plantation of thy next kin." Within this context, let us say that:

The principal difference between baptism in mission and African churches, however, concerns the very significance of the act. For the missionary churches, baptism saves the individual; for the African churches; it introduces the initiate into an earthly as well as a spiritual community. This explains why the faithful who change from one church to another receive baptism again, sometimes for the third time, since their search for salvation proves the nullity of their former conversions."<sup>60</sup>

Within Kimbanquism, no substance or element is used for baptism. The candidates are usually prayed over and pronounced baptized. This method is neither African, Western, nor is it a New Testament practice of baptism. The practice is not only found within Kimbanquism but among other independent churches such as the Church of Israel in Kenya.

In the Israel Church (one of the independent churches in Africa), the pastor baptizes without water by a simple imposition of hands. Very young children can be baptized as a sign of their membership in the community, but once they become adults, they should have themselves baptized again after conversion and confession followed by a period of instruction and probation.<sup>61</sup>

David Barrett says that these new "practices claim to be both genuinely African and genuinely Christian, thereby setting forth an indigenous African praxis or churchmanship."<sup>62</sup>

The traditional influence is so much binding on the lives of the Africans that in spite of the white man's effort to westernize him,

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<sup>59</sup>

Adloff, p. 82.

<sup>60</sup>

Jassy, p. 181

<sup>61</sup>

*Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup>

Barrett, p. 174

both in religion and in government, he continues to exercise that traditional loyalty. The urge to Africanize the Africans' way of life is found in both church and state. Parrinder says:

In Ashanti as elsewhere men have been elected as chiefs who were both educated and Christian, and they have usually felt obligated to perform some of the traditional ritual acts of their office. They poured libations to ancestors whom they had succeeded.<sup>63</sup>

Jassy too observed that among the Luo,<sup>64</sup> Missionaries have tried without success to introduce a Christian rite celebrated in church, but most of the faithful continue to celebrate marriages and burials at the farmstead according to custom."

In these African churches, there is real religious innovation among the members. There are villages set up which are often referred to as "holy villages or Jerusalems." Or in other places, plots of land are bought and designated for purposes of prayer and worship. Houses on these lots are sometimes called houses of prayer, or the land itself may be called Gethsemane or mercy ground or holy place for vigils. The African churches may also purchase land for agricultural or commercial purposes. Land that is purchased for agricultural use is usually used by the community of Christians. Such a land has no private ownership, but a communal ownership. In each community, a complete financial self-support and mutual help is stressed.

Another area of emphasis in the Independent churches which is sadly lacking in the historical churches is the facts of communal love

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<sup>63</sup>

Geoffrey Parrinder, *West African Religion* (New York: Praeger, 1965), p. 188.

<sup>64</sup>

Jassy, p. 34.

which was once the center core of their tradition. While Western Christianity was busy practicing individualism, the African churches transformed themselves into a community of brothers and sisters in Christ. They are selecting and interpreting the central Biblical concept of community and love and rejecting the individualism of European and American Christianity. Some of the American churches are so large that over a period of ten or more years, some members of the congregation still would not know each other. The pastor in some instances may not even know all his flock himself. The African churches are taking seriously the fact that a church ought to be a community of Christians as stressed by Paul and the early Christians.

Turner Describes this re-interpretation by West African independent churches as a major Christian achievement. He says: "A warm community life undergirds this activity corporate worship, and there is a great emphasis on the need for loving one another."<sup>65</sup>

There is more of this brotherly love which portrays the Christian version of African traditional values of corporate life, community, group solidarity, hospitality, etc. On a large scale, these churches have gained a widespread reputation for philanthropy towards the poor and needy in society.<sup>66</sup> The movement has introduced into the African churches a new quality of corporate Christian life, and responsibility—a new *koinonia* sharing of warmth, emotion and mutual caring in the

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Barrett, p. 168, citing H.W. Turner, "Pagan Features in West African Independent Churches," *Practical Anthropology*, XII: 4 (July-August 1965), 146.

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Barrett, p. 168.

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Christian community. "A ritual meal is eaten as a means of restoration of peace between men. 'Let us eat out of the same spoon, drink out of the same cup, and be friends again,' say two Thonga brothers who have quarrelled and wish to be reconciled."<sup>68</sup> It is through such thing that the Eucharist can be made meaningful.

What is killing the Western or historical church in Africa is its ultra-individualism amongst its members. The whole concept of Christian community has been watered down to nothingness. As a result of this, the historical churches in Africa have become biblically illiterate on this matter. They too are playing the game of "follow the leader" and are adopting the western style of isolationism. But the independent churches with their stress on community which is the African way of life is sure to have some positive impact on the historical churches. Emory Ross, in his *African Heritage* wrote:

Community is equally indispensable, equally precious. Never has the concept of individual fulfillment with community been better exemplified than when Jesus taught and lived in the primitive Hebrew community. The west does not have that Christian community, but African Christians now have the opportunity of seeking to create it in Africa. Africa's success in this would bless more than a single continent. The whole world is in agony through not having such Christian community.<sup>69</sup>

In relation to community and the Eucharist, I would say that the African sense of the sacredness of table fellowship is expressed in the observance of the Eucharist, and in the link the African sees between

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*Ibid.*, p. 169.

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Adrian Hasting, *Church And Mission In Modern Africa* (New York: Fordam University Press, 1967), pp. 67-68.

69

Emory Ross, *African Heritage* (New York: Friendship Press, 1952), p. 33.



eating, drinking, prayer and song. It is in this sense that African Christianity is becoming perhaps more "Christian" in its worship than the west not only because it emphasizes the wholeness of God's people, the family sense of belonging, its sense of group fellowship is strong, but its Christian heritage in the line of salvation history proceeding through the Old Testament and the New Testament is deep and abiding. The west has divided this wholeness into laity and clergy. Africa could recover this essential Christian unity by its worship and its gathering of the whole people of God.

### Prayer And Healing In African Churches

Prayer and healing play a major roles in these churches. Some groups "have worked out a new standard posture for public prayer--kneeling, eyes open, hand raised--at the close of worship, participants expectantly face the East whence Christ will return, and pray individually at some time producing together a loud drone."<sup>70</sup>

Some of the African churches have taken on the name which means prayer group, or "prayer people." This group is the "Al-adura Church of the Lord." They too stress healing through faith. They reject both African and modern European medicine as the Christian Scientists. Al-adura or the prayer people also reject infant baptism but practice "mass adult baptism by immersion in rivers and the sea, and this fitted African patterns of cleansing by water."<sup>71</sup>

<sup>70</sup>

Barrett, p. 171 f.

<sup>71</sup>

Parrinder, *Religion In Africa*, p, 152.

Olson in speaking about the Church of the Lord indicated that:

"The Church of the Lord is Pentecostal, with an emphasis on ecstatic experiences (Holy Spirit baptism) and faith healing. Certain rites, however, border on syncretism, i.e. combine Christian elements with animistic ones. In Sierra Leone the sacraments have little importance,<sup>72</sup> "Holy Water" all but replacing them."

Ministers of all levels, however, may consecrate water. Holy water is used to perform ablutions (washing of hands and feet) before entering a place of worship and is used extensively in healing. Members bring bottles to church to be filled with holy water in the same manner as most people in Sierra Leone bring bottles to hospitals or dispensaries for medicine. The water, however, is officially not considered magical. Instead, it symbolizes faith in Jesus, who is the living water.

Other features of worship are: removal of shoes before entering church; numerous candles, which symbolize Jesus, the light of the world; incense wafted up and down the aisles from the censer, which symbolizes prayer going up before God; handclapping, bells, drumming, and stationary dancing and interpretation of visions, i.e., prophecy.<sup>73</sup>

In these African churches, the emphasis on faith and prayer as the means of healing is supported by the references to miracle healing in the New Testament. Oosthuizen noted the following:

As sickness is associated in the African mind with sin, public confession of sin naturally plays an important part at healing ceremonies or in faith-healing Churches. One's soul is strengthened by adhering to the rules of society, which means good behavior and the performance of special rites and sacrifices in honour of the ancestor spirits. Sickness is the result of oneself being anti-social or of having an anti-social act performed against one by way of sorcery, which is considered equal to sin. Health is considered evidence of one's power of soul to ward off evil influences or of one's

<sup>72</sup>

Gilbert W. Olson, *Church Growth in Sierra Leone* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), p. 199.

<sup>73</sup>

*Ibid.*, pp. 199-200.

personal integrity and living in the community.' In African society, as in old Israel, one lives according to a covenant, the breaking of which has negative effects and results in magical power being exercised on the offender. This explains why moralism has magical power, as it sustains the covenant, and the observation of outward laws is rewarded by certain divine benefits.<sup>74</sup>

The priests of the African churches cure illness by teaching the afflicted, and by inducing states of possession in which the evil spirit is thought to leave the body. And by similar means they are supposedly able to ward off witchcraft or sorcery threatened against their sup-  
 pliants. H. W. Turner writes:

In the medical realm the contribution of the prophet--healing churches has lain in the extent to which they have relieved the overstrained government and mission medical services by providing their own assistance, especially and often successfully to women anxious over their childlessness and to those with the wide range of psychosomatic troubles to be found in a rapidly changing society. These churches and prophets have done this at the same time that they have condemned all recourse to magic and the more harmful traditional forms of treatment. Even if some of the new "Christian" forms have themselves been magically interpreted, the use of prayer, fasting, and holy water or blessed oil represent a distinct advance over alternative treatment that might otherwise have been used. The break with traditional practices at this point is one of the most impressive achievements of the better examples of these movements.<sup>75</sup>

Let me mention briefly the role of the Bible in the healing ministry in the African churches. "The Bible plays a prominent part in the meetings but it is not read, it is held over the head of those seeking baptism or cure."<sup>76</sup> Sundlker noted:

We know of scores of congregations where the only owner of a Bible is the preacher himself--and he perhaps is not even able to read! In

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<sup>74</sup>

Oosthuizen, pp. 191-192.

<sup>75</sup>

H. W. Turner, "The Place of Independent Religious Movements in the Modernization of Africa," *Journal of Religion In Africa* 11:1 (1969) 58

<sup>76</sup>

Lloyd, p. 260.

spite of this handicap the prophet may impress his more simple-minded followers with his knowledge of the Book. He manages with the help of a small notebook from which one of his more educated assistants reads chapter and verse to him.<sup>77</sup>

As I pointed out earlier, these churches have denounced all missionary support and are drawing from their own resources. One thing that they did not denounce is the Bible. They accept Christ as their Lord, thus making their faith Christo-centric.

Not only are the indigenous churches in Africa authentically Christian and authentically African, but in their suffering and humility, they have preserved true Christianity to redeem the wealthy, white oriented and secularized churches. These independent churches are different. No thoughtful person (black or white) can deny this truth. The typical indigenous African worship pattern, style and tone of preaching, and church organization, place and role of the ministers or prophets and central concerns often differ widely from the mission congregations.

#### Role Of Women

Women play major roles in the independent churches. Not in all the churches, but many of them are even controlled by women. Sundkler tells us that in South Africa, for example,

The real power basis for women leaders is, however, the Zionist Church. The only Bantu Church with a female superintendent in South Africa, is a Zionist group called the Holy Apostle Mission Church of South Africa led by 'sis Ministress' Lucy S. Mofoken and founded in 1943.<sup>78</sup> She claims as followers seventy-four men and eighty four women.

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<sup>77</sup>

Sundkler, p. 275.

<sup>78</sup>

*Ibid.*, p. 142.

In Zululand it is also noted that women generally show more initiative and energy than men. The arrangement of prayer meetings, occasional collections as a special gift for the superintendent, and visits to other congregations are left in the hands of women. So, in short, women have far reaching influence in these African churches.

The women are ordained. They may become preachers of the gospel. They are given certificates to preach, pray for the sick, to bury the dead, consecrate children, to solemnize marriages, administer the Lord's Supper, and to baptize believers.

Another observer remarked:

Women constitute a majority of the congregation. In part, this is because their demands for conception, for safe delivery and for the health of their children are most persistent....Their roles include priestess and acolyte, which are usually closed to them both in traditional religious cults and in the Christian Churches.<sup>79</sup>

All these elements added to the new Christianity are providing meaningful faith for the African--to speak to him in his own condition and situation. After all, this is the aim of all religions, to provide inner peace and satisfaction for the true believer. Whether we find the origin of the word religion in the Latin *religare*, to bind together, or in *religere*, to rehearse, to perform carefully, it is obvious that in its primary character, religion is not a set of beliefs about God or the individual; but rather ritual and action demonstrating the individual's fellowship and community with his fellow men.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>79</sup>

Lloyd, p. 262.

<sup>80</sup>

Timothy, p. 29.

### Doctrine of the Independent Churches

The independent churches did not break away primarily because of doctrinal differences. One of the basic reasons is that the Africans wanted freedom from "dictatorial" missionaries, sometimes against the formalism of foreign ways which led to "quenching the spirit." There was a general feeling that African customs, laws, dancing, family, marriage, language, clothing, court, etiquette, sayings and philosophy, were decaying where they were not crushed.

Some of the new churches kept to the Bible, prayer-books and hymn books of the parent missions, but they added color in costume and music, using drums and calabashes instead of the "dreary harmonium."<sup>81</sup>

Churches with a basic book of doctrine written by founders are, for example, the Nomyia and Roho Churches in Kenya. Those who borrowed from the mother churches are the Legio and Joera. As I said earlier, only very few of the leaders are able to read, and sometimes not even well enough to grasp the meaning; so in most cases, the means of communication for spreading the message is in oral tradition. Jassy writes:

Because the Spirit of God illumines his saints as spokesmen, they are able to apprehend, express, and communicate as much of his truth as they are open to. By the same token, we who are hearers understand, on the basis of an affinity of spirit, the message which they convey to us in oral or written form.<sup>82</sup>

The doctrine of the independent churches are said to be of two types, namely, the diffused and the transformation of diffused doc-

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<sup>81</sup>

Parrinder, *Religion in Africa*, p. 150.

<sup>82</sup>

Jassy, p. 104.

<sup>83</sup>trine. The diffused doctrine is formed as a result of a 'peaceful co-existence' of traditional beliefs and western ideas. "Because the myth offered by the western churches offered no alternative to traditional beliefs, the latter have persisted side by side with it in an unstable and unsatisfying equilibrium."<sup>84</sup> The transformations of diffused doctrine, is the orderly and organizing structure of the diffused doctrine, by the founder of an African church. It is he who re-arranges the multiple contradictory beliefs around a central idea.

What role does the doctrine of the church play? First, it must be noted that the original doctrine emanates from the founder. It is he who synthesized between different doctrinal sources: the Bible, the teaching of the missionary churches, and beliefs and tradition of the tribe. His own message which is given in a form of sermons, lecture, etc, form what is called the "expressed doctrine." Depending on the previous influence of the founder, the emphasis will be placed more on some aspects of Christian doctrine than on others. But in most cases, the accent is on God the Father, the Holy Spirit, Jesus the Savior, the Blessed virgin, salvation, and the Last Judgment. As time goes on, there is a gradual transition from these Biblical and Christian elements to certain traditional themes, such as the struggle against evil spirits, and the problems posed by modern evolution such as colonial oppression and the division between rich and poor, reinterpreting them in the function of the Christian dichotomy, the dialectic of good and

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<sup>83</sup>
*Ibid.*, p. 127.

<sup>84</sup>
*Ibid.*

evil.

H. W. Turner in his study of the faith of the independent churches noted that: "They cannot be denied the name of Christian Churches. They are strongly Biblical, make no conscious deviations<sup>85</sup> from Orthodox doctrine, and are zealous in evangelism..."

Their preaching tends to be heavily dependent upon two books of the Bible, "Proverbs and James, with their resemblance to African proverbial lore. The preaching does not lay great emphasis upon the life of Christ and the Kingdom."<sup>86</sup>

#### Independent Churches and the Spread of Christianity

The life of the Church really depends upon the independent church movement. The type of growth rate we have noticed within the independent churches has proven that the expansion of Christianity in Africa is being accelerated by the movement. Historical churches seem to be at a standstill in their evangelistic thrust. Parrinder wrote:

It used to be said that African Christians were not concerned about the propagation of their faith, but recent studies have shown that the independent churches have often been the most effective means of spreading the faith.<sup>87</sup>

The estimate of the growth of the independent church, say, within the Luo Tribe of Kenya is about 20 per cent of the whole tribe. Barrett believes that in the year 2000, the membership of independent churches will equal the membership of all the old churches in Africa

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<sup>85</sup>

Perrinder, *Religion In Africa*, p. 153.

<sup>86</sup>

*Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup>

*Ibid.*, p. 149.



<sup>88</sup>combined. This means that there will be about 175 million Christians in the independent churches and 175 million Christians in the historical churches.

When did the independent Church movement start in Africa? Barrett tells us that it started in 1862 with the Luo Tribe in Kenya and since then, the movement has spread to 290 tribes. At the present, it claims about 6,000 churches but in addition, there have been thousands of shortlived independent church movements emerging from the churches that have failed to survive and have died out. As I write this dissertation, there are many more springing up while others are dying. Therefore, the number of tribes within which the movement exists presently and the number of adherents have increased since Barrett did his research. But from the current trend of growth, it seems more than likely that the best projection for the number of Christians in Africa by the year 2000 will be 351 million people.<sup>89</sup>

### The Muslims And The Christians

The Christian church in Africa is in a race with Islam as it is in other parts of the world. From the seventh century when Islam entered Africa from Egypt, it has been inching its way through the heart of the continent from all sides. African Religion has become the battle ground for the two faiths. The trend has always been to convert the indigenous African from his traditional beliefs to become either a Muslim or a Christian. And even though many converts have been made in

<sup>88</sup>Shorter, p. 211.

<sup>89</sup>Barrett, "Analytical Methods of Studying Religious Expansion in Africa", *Journal of Religion In Africa*, III:1 (1970), 22.

favor of Christianity and Islam, the task had not been easy. Like Christianity, Africans accepting Islam have always maintained their African life style and have not been completely acculturated. Even from the early start of the impact of Islam on Africa, it has not been able to win the entire heart of Africa. R.C. Stevenson says that Islam did not make serious inroads into the Nubian social structure. "The clan structure and many traditional elements remain. On the cultural level, like the naming ceremonies, initiation rites and marriage procedures, traditional elements became partially Islamized, or are re-modelled, or continue as before but with an Islamic cachet."<sup>90</sup>

One of the weaknesses of Islam as that of Christianity is that it too is divided into sects. But notwithstanding, Islam has had a greater number of converts than Christianity.

Religious Expansion in Africa In \*  
The Twentieth Century--Adherents  
in Millions, and in per cent

	1900	1970	2000
Muslims	32 (27%)	145 (47%)	326 (42%)
Christians	4 ( 3%)	97 (28%)	351 (46%)
Animists	82 (70%)	104 (30%)	91 (12%)
Total Population	118(100%)	346(100%)	768(100%)

What have been the cause for the success of Islam in Africa? Dr. John Hutchison at the Claremont Graduate School in California said, "In Negro regions of Africa, Islam's genuine commitment to racial equa-

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Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, citing R.C. Stevenson, "Some Aspects of the Spread of Islam in the Nubia Mountains (Kordofn Province, Republic of the Sudan), in I.M. Lewis (ed.) *Islam In Tropical Africa* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 226f.

\* Notes: Statistics for Christians here are those claimed by the Churches. In *Jowrnal of Religion in Africa*, III:1 (1970), 23.

lity has gained a ready hearing for this faith precisely at the time when Negro Africans have come to view Christianity as a pious front for white racism."<sup>91</sup>

According to Herskovits, Islam is successful in Africa because it "provided not only prestige but a sense of cultural comfort."<sup>92</sup> Or in the words of Lloyd, "Islam has always appeared more tolerant of indigenous social structure though, at the present time, its adherents appear more strongly opposed to participation in traditional rituals or secret associations than do most Christians."<sup>93</sup> Timothy helps us reassess the situation even better. He said:

The obstacles to missionary advance in Africa were undoubtedly the challenge of Islam, the divisions in the Christian church and the Godless and vicious acts of Europeans in Africa not omitting tribal wars. The fact that Islam is completely free from racialism commends itself readily to the African pagan. The fact that Islam does not appear to hold a brief for imperialism but positively transcends political associations, makes an even stronger appeal to the African.<sup>94</sup>

Timothy adds that "while the European propagators of Christianity in Africa command the Africans, *allez*, (go) Islam invites them *allons*, (let us go). To the African mind the difference is striking."<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> John A. Hutchison, *Paths of Faith* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1969), p. 444.

<sup>92</sup> Melville J. Herskovits, *The Human Factor In Changing Africa* (New York: Random House, 1962), p. 196.

<sup>93</sup> Lloyd, p. 101.

<sup>94</sup> Timothy, p. 21.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

Another area of Islamic success was the fact that it was willing to adapt the form of marriage the Africans knew as a way of life. This had a lot of impact on the Africans.

The challenge for the Christians in terms of Christian-Muslim relationship--the determining factor as to who wins will depend upon the religion that will root itself deeply into the life of the people and speak to them in terms of their experience. Unless Christians, especially white Christians put an end to their petty segregation and racialism, Islam will be the voice of the day. Thomas Beetham wrote:

What remains crystal clear is that the Christian Gospel is rejected by many Africans today because those of European race, in Africa and outside, claim the name of Christ but do not do his works: their practice of racial segregation and acquiescence in unequal opportunities for the races being in fact a denial of fellowship in Christ. This is the strongest challenge of Communism (as well as Islam) to Christianity in Africa today.<sup>96</sup>

On the other hand, disunity and fragmentation of the church will be the cause for Islam's easy victory. In order to check this challenge and victory, unity and cooperation between the churches becomes an urgency. Or in the words of Christian Baeta, Chairman of the Division of mission and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches, "The task of the mission is to help build a real African Christendom."<sup>97</sup>

#### A Forum of Dialogue--An Ecumenical Approach

Whenever the issue of the independent churches and the historical churches is discussed, the inevitable question is raised; "What

<sup>96</sup>

Thomas A. Beetham, *Christianity and The New Africa* (New York: Praeger, 1967), p. 88.

<sup>97</sup>

Oosthuizen, p. 5.

type of dialogue, if there is any, exists between these two churches? Is there any cooperation between them or not?"

The answer is yes, there are efforts being made by members of the two bodies to come together in a Christian Council to see where they are at odds.

At least, so it seems, it has been pointed out by some critics that one of the major weaknesses of the independent churches is the "lack of international links, which can lead to parochialism and stagnation,"<sup>98</sup> but that has not been the case with all independent churches. In many parts of Africa today, Christian ecumenical councils are opening dialogue between these churches and the mission churches. In addition, some are even being accepted into the All African Council of Churches as well as the World Council of Churches. The application for membership into the World Council of Churches filed by the Kimbanguist Church, the largest of all African independent churches has been considered and that church now, is a member of the World Council of Churches. On the occasion when Kimbanguism was being debated upon for admissions into the Council, Jean Bokeleale, on the Executive Council sharply criticized the Western--oriented traditionalists of the Christian faith stating:

If a Western missionary introduces a new church to Africa, it is automatically considered to be a church byg if an African starts a new Church it is taxed with being a sect.

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Parrinder, *Religion in Africa*, P. 163.

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William H. Crane, "The Kimbanguist Church and the Search for Authentic Catholicity," *Christian Century*, (June 3, 1970). LXXXVII:22

Dr. George Thomas remarked that it was a speech from Metropolitan Nikodim of the Russian Orthodox Church that brought the Kimbanguist Church into the World Fellowship.<sup>100</sup> The statement is supported by William H. Crane who said:

The clinching speech in favor came from Metropolitan Nikodim of the Russian Orthodox Church. The final vote was overwhelmingly for admission with only three votes against and three abstentions.<sup>101</sup>

The Kimbanguist Church has three million adherents and it calls itself "*L'Eglise de Jesus-Christ sur la Terre*."<sup>102</sup> (The Church of Jesus Christ on earth).

A recent publication of the World Council of Churches (WCC), *One World*, carried an article on the High Priest Kivuli and founder of the African Israel Church Nineveh. The article said in part:

The High Priest was very interested in the wider Christian world and the ecumenical movement. Kivuli attended a WCC consultation on independent churches in 1962 and his church became a full member of the National Christian Council of Kenya last year after a great deal of discussion within the Council.<sup>103</sup>

In another issue of the WCC publication, this statement about the independent churches was written:

It is here perhaps that the ecumenical movement can find its proper point of convergence with the charismatic movement. If this movement can bring fresh religious insights into Christian renewal,

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<sup>100</sup>

George B. Thomas, "Kimbanguism: Authentically African, Authentically Christian" (Atlanta, Ga. Dec. 1970), 24. Unpublished Report.

<sup>101</sup>

Crane, in George B. Thomas, p. 24.

<sup>102</sup>

Parrinder, *Religion in Africa*, p. 163.

<sup>103</sup>

David Aoko, "High Priest Kivuli," *One World*, No. 3 (February 1975), 17.

with emphasis on fervent trust in God, faith in Jesus Christ and trust in the Power of the Holy Spirit, the ecumenical movement will be immeasurably strengthened. Then we shall all be enabled to recognize the splendid and complementary diversity of churches and Christians who go to make up the unity of the whole Church and the unity of the human family.<sup>104</sup>

### Areas of Emphasis In African Churches--Summary

The next few pages provide an outline of the achievements of the independent churches in Africa. As Barrett says, "No one movement emphasizes all these features, but each emphasizes a large selection. The whole complex of these parallels represents a creative response to the break-down of old forms, and an attempt at Christianizing the earlier traditional complex."<sup>105</sup>

COMMUNITY STRUCTURE--small face-to face communities, centered initially on an extended family or clan, total membership mainly under 1,000, based often on traditional social structure, characterized by fellowship, *Agape* and *Philadelphia*, communal life, communities of love, participation of all as apostles, prominence of women, the desacralization of politics;

LAND AND PROPERTY--centres of religious innovation called holy villages or Jerusalems, houses of prayer, prayer-plots called Gethsemanes or mercy grounds, holy places for vigils, open-air worship sites, communal ownership of land, agricultural or commercial enterprises, expensive city properties, large business undertakings to enhance prestige of leaders, complete financial self-support, stress on philanthropic funds, burial societies and mutual help societies;

LAWS AND TABOOS--elaborate legal constitutions, verbose applications to government, promulgation of apostolic letters, written diplomas and certificates, two holy days each week (Sunday, and Wednesday or Friday), sabbatarianism, tithing and fasting, use of unleavened bread, personal austerity, prohibition of tobacco, alcohol and pork,

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Rex Davis, "Charisma and Community," *One World*, No. 2. (December 1974), 24.

105

Barrett, p. 273.

vegetarianism, rejection of European medicine, use of homoeopathic medicine, reintroduction of menstrual and other taboos, a marked legalism, severe discipline including the death penalty, spiritual vagrancy or fluidity of membership, experimental membership, occasional dual or plural membership (in mission and separatist churches), random borrowing from various historical denominations;

RELIGIOUS CONCEPTS--a supernatural view of life, the divinity of the Holy Spirit, God as the Living God, of Power, the God of Miracles, the God of the Impossible, the God of our Ancestors, remembrance of ancestors, return of the ancestors, canonization of recent political martyrs, reversed colour bar in heaven, millennial dogmas, promise of a land free from sorcery, theories of mythological eras in church history, a claimed indigenous or African theology;

RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP--Prophets and prophetess, Prophesying, healers, faith healing, titled officials, differentiated leadership systems, baptizers, evangelists, judges, dialogue preaching, lay involvement, mothers-in-God, and paradigm of death and resurrection for prophets, traditions of prophets' miracles, new holy books, stress on spiritual gifts, pneumatic phenomena, trances visions and dreams, revelation on sacred mountains, acceptance of polygamists as members but infrequently as officials;

RELIGIOUS SYMBOLISM--symbolic colours revealed in dreams, blue and white as sacred colours, new forms of dress, coloured robes for dignitaries, white robes for all participants, holy vestments for worship, vestments with Ethiopian national colours; uniforms, symbolic letters or embroidery, monograms, large red crosses, special headwear, turbans, mitres, beards, shaven heads, removal of shoes, indigenous craftsmanship, carrying of holy staffs or banners and flags (similar to Ethiopian Orthodox Church) as symbols of pilgrimage, coffin as ritual symbol of death of Christ, use of candles and candelabra in revelation, burning of strips of blessed paper;

MAGICAL CONCEPTS--recognition of the reality of magic but opposition to all its forms benevolent or malevolent, destruction of all fetishes, rejection of charms and nostrums;

RITUALS--special greetings with prayer and ritual, ritual postures during prayer, blessing of medicines, blessing of newly-bought articles, ritual dancing, running in a circle, preaching while running up and down, ritual use of drugs or stimulants, walking through fire, anointing with oils, foot-washing, use of holy water, purification rites, partial baptism for returned backsliders, baptism in "Jordan," infant communion, ritual wailing in response to preacher, communal weeping for sins, ritual vomiting of sin, public confessional, sin detection at entrance to sacred enclosure; ringing of



hand bells, exorcism of devils, millennial release from sorcery, mass confession of witches;

WORSHIP--sealing of doors and windows during worship, indigenous liturgies, praying bands, mass glossolalia, multilingual praying ensemble, corporate praying in a drone facing east, telephonic conversation with the Holy Ghost, special ritual language, revealed script, unintelligible revealed holy words or names, writing under inspiration, religious grunting hiccupping or humming, religious shouts, religious joy and ecstasy, long prayers testimonies, stress on the name Jesus, drums or flutes in worship, use of megaphones, hand-clapping, rhythmic movement, antiphonal responses, annual pass-over festivals, processions, incessant religious itineration; vernacular hymns, indigenous tunes in worship, vernacular scripture reading, vernacular names of endearment of Jesus, and insistence through out on the validity of the VERNACULAR even though language francae may be freely employed in multitribal contests.<sup>106</sup>

### Summary

In this chapter, I have discussed the ten basic causative factors which resulted in the rise of the independent church movement. I said that they were, namely; discrepancy between mission and scripture, division in mission churches, rise of nationalism, personality clashes between colonial power and missionaries on the one hand and African converts on the other hand, the distorted image or concept of life brought by the western man; his effort to present Christianity in a narrow self-image, western man's petty racialism and segregationism, his introduction of a foreign concept of eschatology, his ignorance of African psychology, language, and culture. All these are summarized into social, political, economic, ethnic, religious, and theological factors that resulted in the rise of the independent church movements in Africa.

What did these churches do in terms of renewal? There was a return to the use of African symbolism and elements in Christian worship

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<sup>106</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 273-274.

and sacraments. The music, the language, and other aspects of Christianity that were oriented to western style were changed into African expressions and the church began to take on an Afro-Biblical style of ministry. African churches started to accentuate faith healing, prayer, women's role in the church. Women received recognition for a fuller participation in running their own church activities. The churches developed their own style of ministry, doctrine, liturgies which grew out of their life's experience and community religious background.

As a result of the independent churches, Christianity in Africa is able to reach the inner heart of the man and woman on the grass-root levels--people whose life had never been actually touched in spite of the white man's propagation of more than a century ago. These African churches are appealing to the Africans because they meet the various needs of the people. These needs may be religious, emotional, psychological, medical, or even physical, but what stands out clearly is the fact that the African churches are able to re-interpret the Biblical revelation of God to the people in the language which they understand.

The church presently faces a serious threat from the Muslims. Islam has been more successful in winning more converts in Africa because it is incarnated into the culture and does not engage in the inhuman practices of the west such as colonialism, imperialism and mass exploitation of the indigenous population and their resources.

Unless Christianity takes a new and better approach, the victory of the Muslims is inevitable. On the other hand, with the emergence of the independent churches, a new day is dawning on the church

in Africa. This positive factor becomes a plus for the church. At least, it gives the church a better prospect of the future to anticipate. That is, through the effort of the independent churches, many of the adherents of the indigenous religions will come to the Christian Church rather than into Islam.

Concerning the acceptance of these new churches into national and international ecumenical bodies, many of them are already accepted. Some have even joined the World Council of Churches. Why is this so? There is a growing awareness that these churches are not only authentic Christian but (as Rex Davis put it), they "bring fresh religious insights into Christian renewal, with emphasis on fervent trust in God, faith in Jesus Christ and trust in the power of the Holy Spirit." For the WCC itself knows that the future of the Christian church in Africa lies in the hands of the independent churches. It is only through their effort to revitalize the faith that Christianity can truly survive in Africa.

The summary of the influence of these churches in the light of what they have contributed to Christianity cover such areas as community structure, land and property, laws and taboos, religious concepts, religious leadership, religious symbolism, magical concepts, rituals, worship and vernacular.

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107

Davis, p, 24.

## CHAPTER V

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

## THE DESTINY OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH IN AFRICA

Restatement of the Problem

The problem that I have been trying to point to in this professional Project is that Western mission Christianity has not been able to plant and transplant itself on the African soil and become a way of life for the African people. It has always been presented and received as an alien religion. Consequently, the Christian faith in Africa is undergoing change, turmoil, schism and renewal. The main thrust of this renewal effort is to re-vitalize Christianity by making it applicable to African understanding of life--to make it indigenous to Africa since western missionaries were incapable of bringing about the desired changes. The independent churches have taken on the task. The outcome of this task has been a new interpretation of Christianity in a contextual way. It has taken on a new tune and a new rhythm which the African can understand. It has taken on a pattern with which the African can identify. The independent churches have integrated African traditional values into the faith so that it incarnates their own understanding of life. They have taken the actual "kernel" out of the faith and thrown away the empty shells.

But this has not been easy. These Churches have come into direct confrontation and sometimes direct denouncement from the his-

torical churches. Nevertheless, the independent churches are growing rapidly in spite of the difficulties that they encounter. Their membership is increasing faster than those of the historical churches.

In other cases, there is now a growing sense of awareness of the need to work together with other churches. Thus, ecumenical bodies from the main line churches are now opening their doors to the independent churches for dialogue.

Why is this? The reason is that the historical churches have learned that these new churches are not just "sects" or "cults," but that they are authentically Christian as well as authentically African. Moreover, they realize that the life of the Christian church in Africa depends upon the success or failure of these independent churches. As for Western mission Christianity, its continuous usefulness will depend upon its ability to adapt itself and incarnate itself into the culture.

#### Summary of Chapters II, III, & IV

The planting of Christianity in Africa is as old as the history of Christianity itself. Though Christianity entered Africa by the first century through Egypt and expanded down into Nubia, and Ethiopia, before it got to West Africa by the 19th century, yet, it did not make much impression on the people of Africa. It was during the 19th century and after that time that Christianity began to win a large following. But while this was happening, westerners continued to exploit Africa and Africans in the name of the Church.<sup>1</sup> Thus, along with the

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<sup>1</sup> Kwame Nkrumah, *Revolutionary Path* (New York: International, 1973), p. 24.

Christian message, Africans received both good and evil impact.

In chapter III, I demonstrated that western influence can be seen in the fields of education, evangelism, general public health services, and leadership development. Not the least, western influence was also exerted upon the entire African institutional structure. As Nkrumah put it, "the scale and type of economic activity, the idea of the accountability of the individual conscience introduced by the Christian religion, countless other silent influences, these have all made an indelible impression upon African society."<sup>2</sup>

As I said earlier, there were both negative and positive influences made on Africans by the westerners. The question whether Christianity has done more harm than good for Africa is debatable, because we see such positive contributions of the Christian church in areas of health and education which still stand as monument to love for humanity; whereas on the other end of the spectrum, we cannot help but also notice the disruption of African tribal solidarity and African social institutions as a result of missionary influence. I think that their attempt to destroy African culture indiscriminately was the most unchristian thing to do.

In chapter IV, I pointed out at least nine basic factors that give rise to the independent church movements. The first of these factors entails ten causative elements. The rise of the independent church movements in Africa introduced new Christian experience in the church. There was a return to African symbolism, acceptance of African music and vernacular into the church. Christianity became a new dynam-

<sup>2</sup>Kwame Nkrumah, *Consciencism* (New York: Modern Reader, 1970), p. 70.

ic force in Africa when indigenous elements were introduced into the sacraments and worship; when there was emphasis on the concept and practice of marriage to which the Africans were accustomed; when prayer and healing were given major place in the African church; when the role of women became more influential and important; when the African churches developed their own doctrines drawn from their own experience; these and many others were necessary for an effective propagation of the gospel in Africa. Another point of significance is the dialogue with the historical churches. Through this dialogue, many of the independent churches are becoming part of the national and international ecumenical bodies.

As I have tried to emphasize, the adding of these elements into the religious pattern has not been the only crucial factors that gave Christianity its wide spread acceptance among the indigenous people, but, that the independent churches have made Christianity meaningful and practical. They have brought the faith to the level at which the people were able to understand and participate in it fully. This new form of Christianity is addressing itself to the social, religious, psychological, and spiritual needs of the Africans. How is it doing it?

Socially, Christianity is taking on the cultural and traditional patterns of the people. This new form of Christianity does not preach the destruction of traditional life style as a prerequisite to becoming a Christian. Entry into the church fellowship is now a matter no longer of law or color, but of faith.

Psychologically, the prayer and faith healing ministry have added to the success of the new churches. The holy water or blessed oil are distinct achievements. Through this type of ministry, the new churches have relieved government and mission medical services considerably. These are not only design vestments and drums being added to make Christianity meaningful. This is a type of ministry that makes a difference in the life of the followers. These churches are finding what Professor Idowu calls, the "Biblical answers to the spiritual yearnings of the hearts of Africans."<sup>3</sup> These churches are finding ways and means by which the Christian faith could best be presented, interpreted, and inculcated in Africa so that Africans will hear God in Jesus Christ addressing Himself immediately to them in their own native situation and particular circumstances.

#### Statement About The Thesis

The thesis of this professional project, that, African tradition has had much impact on Christianity in Africa through the independent church movement is supported by the many indigenous life patterns of Africans that are still accepted and practiced in the Christian churches. The form of worship, the emphasis on rituals, sacrifice, the use of medicine, anointing with oil and perfumes, prayer and healing, the stress on symbolism, (the cross, as the symbol of the living Christ, the star, as a symbol of the ascending power of hope, the use of colors, such as white, representing clean life; and green, representing life

<sup>3</sup>E. Bolaji Idowu, "Introduction," in Kwesi Dickson and Paul Ellingworth (eds.) *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1969), p. 16.



with a future hope), the stress on community life, polygamy, and taboos are all drawn from the tradition of the people as they understand it. In spite of all the efforts by westerners to uproot, suppress or outlaw these traditions, they continue to survive.

I therefore, maintain that African tradition has had more influence on Christianity in Africa than westerners are willing to admit.

### Preliminary Conclusion About the Thesis

In light of what I have been trying to show above, I am convinced that the church in Africa, be it the historical mission churches or the African independent churches, cannot expect to have much influence on the life of the people, nor will it be able to grow unless it adapts itself to the environment in which it finds itself.

The survival of the African traditional as well as the mission churches depends on the continuous eloquence and inner dynamics of their testimony. As long as the church continues to be the living instrument of the faith in Africa, indigenization will be achievable. So long as the church makes the faith truly African and the Church's administrations entrusted to Africans and the church ceases to be just another offshoot of the colonial custom, there will be high hope of future prospect.

For we now know that the Gospel does not have to be seen and understood through the lenses of Western spectacles or accepted in western image before it is accepted by God: for he encompasses all cultures and all languages. Therefore, the impact of African tradition

on African Christianity through the independent church movements can be seen as a divine intervention whereby God is revealing Himself to the Africans.

### The Destiny of the Christian Church In Africa

When the independent churches succeeded, they had no help from outsiders. They threw off missionary control, and the machinery of mission (financial subsidies, multiple committees, link with government, etc). The independent churches renounced every thing except the Bible. They have provided their own finance and manpower unlike their counterparts, political territorial independence. From their own effort, they have acquired self-government, self-propagation, and self-support.

The one crucial urgency for both independent and historical churches in Africa is a strong base for theological education for the development of leadership. There is a need now for the type of theological education which will encourage indigenous theological thinking, reflection, and expression. Or as Dr. J. W. Zvomunondita Kurewa put it, we need a theological training that is "indigenously oriented to enable effective and meaningful proclamation of the gospel and nurturing of the Christian Community in Africa."

This would mean utilizing African religious philosophy. It would mean creative thinking and building on what we already have, not only translating and transforming what has already been done by some other people, but Africans themselves will have to produce for themselves and draw from their own resources. This is where self-support

and self-government come in. It would mean that theological education be related to the African world view. In the seminaries in Africa, heavy emphasis should be placed on the mission of the church as well as in the field of ethics rather than dogmatics and dogmatic formulations.

Africans should not model their theology on the Western pattern but build it on the basis of experience and feeling and the oral traditions of the continent. African churches should be able to combine worship, fellowship and witness with the struggle for freedom. There is a crucial need to develop a pattern of worship that is suitable to the primary needs of the African community.

In the theological seminaries, the mission of the church must take priority over other things. What is the mission to which the African churches are called? This mission must be seen in terms of God's call to the church or to African Christian community to respond in faith to what He has done for men in Jesus Christ. This means that we are challenged to rethink the motives, message, methods, and goals of the church. This means that we do not lie in the organizational structure but answer Christ's question, "Who do you say that I am?"

In doing Church History in our Seminaries, it should be taught from African perspective.

If it is true that 'historical narrative proper arises when a people experiences the historical process by which it is shaped into a nation or a state, Africa will become even more aware of its own history. Church history should not be studied from a distance, so that the impression is created that all the major events in Church history took place somewhere else, especially in Europe; it should be taught in such a way that not only are theological developments seen as within the Church, but that, as far as Africa is concerned,

the dynamic of the growth of the Church is seen on the African continent.<sup>4</sup>

Training institutions and seminaries should be adequately staffed. One of the most urgent tasks facing all denominations of the Christian church in Africa is to increase the number of local pastors. The present rate of ordination is inadequate to meet the needs of the great and rapidly growing church. The aim should not be simply to train or produce academically well-trained theologians, but men and women who will be able to launch inspired evangelization activities in the villages.

One of the problems of the seminaries in Africa is that most of them are far removed from the cities and they tend to become remote and ineffective. I would encourage that the total life of the seminaries be integrated with the life of the community and take on the interest of the community. Students should be given responsibility and not treated like children and pre-school children. The methods of studies should be under constant re-evaluation and revision.

All necessary actions should be taken to recruit students for theological education. The seminaries should serve both the historical and independent churches. As pointed out by Oosthuizen, the shortage of new recruits is due to seven major factors. Namely, the spiritual condition of the Church; the decreasing respect for the African minister with his own community, the difficulty experienced by churches in supporting their present number of ministers, the low stipends paid to

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G. C. Oosthuizen, *Post-Christianity In Africa* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), p. 260.

African ministers, the growing nihilism amongst the intelligentsia as a result of the failure of the Church to relate the Gospel message to the contemporary problems of society; conservatism of the old clergy under whom the young clergy have to work; and finally, the African Christian community seldom sees the office of the ministry as an integral part of the life of the Church itself.<sup>5</sup>

I believe that once these barriers are broken down the future of the church in Africa will be promising.

Another area which determines the future of the church in Africa is the ability of the African churchmen to articulate a theology of liberation. It must be a theology reflecting on the African experience under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, attempting to redefine the relevance of the Christian faith from African long experience.

It is therefore, a task facing all African churches to see their role as a divine call by God to revise and re-direct theology and ethics in a clearer knowledge of God whose property is freedom, justice, love and liberation. This is the central message of both the Old and the New Testaments: Cone and Wilmore tell us that:

The biblical God is the God who is involved in historical process for the purpose of human liberation. To know him is to know what he is doing in historical events as they relate to the liberation of the oppressed. The liberation theme stands at the center of the Hebrew view of God in the Old Testament. Throughout Israelite history, God is known as the one who acts in history for the purpose of Israel's liberation from oppression....In the New Testament the same theme is carried forward by the appearance of Jesus Christ....He is the liberator par excellence who reveals not only who God is and

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*Ibid.*

what he is doing, but also who black people are and what they are called to do about human degradation and oppression....The Christian gospel is the good news of liberation.<sup>6</sup>

For too long, the African people have concerned themselves with the theme of indigenization rather than liberation. As a new day dawns before us, the light will break through and we will see the various ramifications of imperialism, colonialism and neo-colonialism; then probably, African churchmen will learn that Africanization must also involve liberation from centuries of poverty, humiliation and exploitation. Religion for the Africans is one of the few fields within which emancipation is possible. "It may seem ironical that 'ecclesiastical colonialism' still prevails in many of the independent African countries, not to mention the Church in South Africa and its seminaries."<sup>7</sup>

Therefore, a truly African theology cannot escape the requirement of helping the indigenous church to become relevant to the social and political ills of Africa, which are not unrelated to Euro-American imperialism and racism. Thus the liberation theology of which I speak has to do with more than political oppression and social justice. It is Jesus Christ who is the liberator; the justified man is also liberated from "the lust of the flesh and the pride of life."

For the future of the church in Africa is best described in the words of Per Hassing when he wrote:

Only as the Christian faith addresses itself to the questions arising out of Africa's long past and acquiring a new urgency with the

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<sup>6</sup> James Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore, "Black Theology and African Theology," in Massie, Priscella (ed.) *Black Faith and Black Solidarity* (New York: Friendship Press, 1973), pp. 110-111.

<sup>7</sup> Oosthuizen, p. 7.

many perplexities of the present day African existence will indigenization become a reality. The church cannot hope to become permanently rooted in the African soil until it begins to struggle more seriously than ever before with the problems and questions emerging from African life.<sup>8</sup>

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8

Per Hassing, "Christian Theology In Africa," *Religion In Life*, XL: 4 (Winter 1971), 510.

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